MINSTREL DIVINE AND OTHER ESSAYS

Dr. BALBIR SINGH

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MINSTREL DIVINE
AND
OTHER ESSAYS

by

DR BALBIR SINGH

(Translated from Punjabi by Mohinder Singh Sarna)

पुस्तकालय
127814
गुरुकुल कांगड़ी विश्वविद्यालय

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Foreword

It has been quite an experience for me going through 'Minstrel Divine and other Essays' by Dr. Balbir Singh. The essays, originally written in Punjabi, have been rendered into English by Mr. Mohinder Singh Sarna, who had the privilege of being the recipient of the affection and patronage of Dr. Balbir Singh. Mr. Sarna's adoration of Dr. Balbir Singh and understanding of his vibrant mind have enabled him to capture the spirit of the original. The English rendering of the Essays reveals Mr. Sarna's command over English and feeling for its finer nuances.

Dr. Balbir Singh was a savant and sage, whose life symbolised passion and dedication in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. He blended deep understanding of theology and philosophy with analytical powers which he had developed as a perceptive student of Science. The beautiful blend constitutes the hallmark of Dr. Balbir Singh's creative genius.

The seven essays in the present collection bring into focus many facets of Dr. Balbir Singh's composite sensibility. The essays threw into saliency Dr. Balbir Singh's rootedness in Sikh scriptures. He has the flair for summoning passages from Gurbani to his aid while interpreting subtle and intricate philosophical and mataphysical issues.

I trust the English-knowing world will benefit immensely by the fecund insights and profound erudition of Dr. Balbir Singh.

I offer my felicitations to Mr. Sarna who has brought his creativity to bear upon the present enterprise. For him, it has been a labour of love.

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Patiala.

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Vice-Chancellor

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Preface

Dr Balbir Singh was a great figure in Sikh renaissance rubbing shoulders with such giants as Bhai Vir Singh and Prof. Puran Singh. He was the most eminent among the first generation of Sikh intellectuals who were trained in western disciplines. These intellectuals having already imbibed the oriental philosophy reacted with characteristic maturity to western scientific thought.

Dr Balbir Singh's versatile genius had many facets. His was an integrated personality in which various strands had been interwoven in an exquisite pattern. The ruling passion of his life was a relentless quest for knowledge. He was an intellectual giant and a scholar of great eminence. His scholarship covered a wide range of disciplines, namely religion, science, fine arts, literature and philosophy. He was never happier than when surrounded by books, both ancient and modern. He relished the company of Greek masters like Plato and Aristotle, drank deep into the western philosophies of Hegel, Kant and Nietsche and loved poets like Shakespeare, Goethe and Milton. Buddha and Shankracharya fascinated him. The *Vedas* and *Srutis*, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, *Puranas* and *Upanishads*, the *Bible* and *Quran* were all subjects of his close study. He was well read in history, ancient, medieval and modern and well-versed in the knowledge of movements, social, economic, political and religious which have moulded the destiny of mankind and generated currents and cross currents of thought and action.

Scholarship had become with him a way of life and the knowledge gained therefrom had become a state of mind. Besides the Sikh scriptures he had made an analytical and discerning study of *Vedic*, *Yogic* and Buddhist texts. Thus he acquired a profound knowledge of Indian philosophical and metaphysical heritage. This background enabled him to embellish his reflective essays with quotations and anecdotes from the oriental history and mythology. Quotations from the multifarious sources of his study came to him appositely and effortlessly.

Besides being a scientist, a theologian, an etymologist and lexicographer of great distinction Dr Balbir Singh was also one of the leading essayists of the Punjabi language. His three collections of reflective essays '*Kalam di Karamat*', '*Lammi Narda*' and '*Shudh Sarup*' bear eloquent testimony to his erudition and philosophic bent of mind. These reflective essays are remarkable for their thought content, wisdom and wit. His prose is a marvel of lucidity, felicity and profundity. Its texture is rich, variegated and colourful. He wrote in the best tradition of literary diction. He was among the few writers of Punjabi language who could express philosophical and scientific ideas in chaste and simple language.

In his essays we find him frequently straying away from the main theme into apparently unconnected lanes and by-lanes but towards the end he harmonizes all the components and weaves them into an indivisible texture. In fact the secret of the powerful impact his essays have on our mind is his unrivalled ability to correlate, absorb and synthesize with effortless ease the different components of his theme into one organic whole. Each one of his philosophical and reflective essays is perfected by its different parts, as the parts observe decorum by contributing directly to the whole with no loose ends left.

We realise the greatness of his genius as an essayist when we compare him with contemporary writers and see how they dwindle in importance.

The present volume contains, among others, such famous essays of Dr Balbir Singh as '*Rabab*' (Minstrel Divine) *Sev Kamai* (In the service of Humanity), '*Abdar Moti*' (Pearl of Peerless lustre) and '*Kalam di Karamat*' (Miracle of the Pen). Those who have not been able to read the original essays in Punjabi will find this volume a rare and unforgettable experience.

MOHINDER SINGH SARNA

Contents

Page
Foreword (iii)
Preface (v)
Minstrel Divine (ਰਬਾਬ) 1
Pearl of Peerless Lusire (ਆਬਦਾਰਮੋਤੀ) 32
Miracle of the Pen (ਕਲਮ ਦੀ ਕਰਾਮਾਤ) 62
In the Service of Humanity (ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈ) 73
Power Born of an Ideal (ਆਦਰਸ਼ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਕਤੀ) 102
Prayer (ਪ੍ਰਾਰਥਨਾ) 113
Gurmukh (ਗੁਰਮੁਖ) 120

MINSTREL DIVINE

[ਰਬਾਬ]

A thousand years ago there lived in Baghdad a genius called Abu-Nasser Farabi who was not only a philosopher but also a great musician. His surname 'Farabi' was derived from the city of Farab which was his birth place. He led a simple life and cared not for material wealth. He kept only a small portion of his monthly pension for his personal needs and refunded the rest so that it might be spent for the welfare of the poor. He was interested only in the pursuit of art and learning. 'Tarikh-ul-Hukma' records a very interesting anecdote about his skill as a musician. A wealthy patron of fine arts, so the story goes, who had heard of Farabi's accomplishments was very keen to meet him. Many invitations that he sent failed to evoke response. Then suddenly one day Farabi barged into the rich man's house while he was having a good time in the gay company of his friends. The celebrated musician was in rags. His hair were dishevelled and he presented such a sight that every one took him for a beggar. The master of the house vented his anger on the gate keeper for having allowed such a wretch into the house. Meanwhile his gay companions had got busy in making fun of Farabi. Provoked by their vulgar demeanour the musician took out his instrument and played a tune which sent the whole company in an uncontrollable fit of laughter. They laughed and laughed till they were out of breath. Then he changed the key and played another tune. The laughter ceased and in its place sobs were heard. They all cried bitterly and inconsolably. The master musician again changed the key. This time his music put every one in deep slumber. He then wrote the following message on a piece of paper and left the house :

'You were desirous of meeting Abu-ul-Nasser Farabi. He came. But you made fun of him. Nevertheless he entertained you with his musical skill. And now he has left.'

This happened in Baghdad a thousand years ago. Five centuries later Baghdad witnessed the musical skill of another master musician. His name was Nanak. In addition to the three keys that Farabi's instrument had, Nanak's instrument had a fourth one, a master key which transported the slumbering audiences to the ethereal regions of ineffable bliss and quietude.

ਅਹਿਨਿਸਿ ਸੁੰਨਿ ਸਮਾਧਿ ਸਮਾਵੈ

(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: 1-5, ਸਫਾ 877)

Narrating Guru Nanak's visit to Baghdad, Bhai Gurdas wrote :

ਫਿਰ ਬਾਬਾ ਗਿਆ ਬਗਦਾਦ ਨੋ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਜਾਇ ਕੀਆ ਅਸਥਾਨਾ ॥
ਇਕ ਬਾਬਾ ਅਕਾਲ ਰੂਪ ਦੂਜਾ ਰਬਾਬੀ ਮਰਦਾਨਾ ॥
ਦਿੱਤੀ ਬਾਂਗਿ ਨਿਮਾਜ਼ ਕਰਿ ਸੁਨ ਸਮਾਨ ਹੋਆ ਜਹਾਨਾ ॥

(ਵਾਰ 1-35)

It was an age of fanaticism. Islamic fundamentalism and Shariat which banned music held sway over Baghdad. Pir Dastgir, the contemporary Muslim pir of Baghdad heard Nanak's symphony. He was reminded of what Simoon Mohib, one of his own ancestors had said about music :

"Music is a call from God to the souls and ecstacy is the answer of the souls to the call, while swooning means the merging of soul in God."

Guru Nanak's music was a call from God. He had the skill to turn the fourth key which Farabi lacked. His rabab had a wider key board, having keys that produced tunes unheard before. His song was rich in divine harmony. It produced exquisite ethereal notes hearing which the human spirit rises above its mundane earthly existence and roams about in regions celestial. His prelude, interlude and close were not merely a skilful succession of notes. His song had a super-terrestrial quality, a cosmic reach which attuned the human spirit to the infinite and made it soar above the stars. It was to this divine minstrelsy that he referred when he wrote :

ਸਬਦਿ ਅਨਾਹਦਿ ਸੋ ਸਹੁ ਰਾਤਾ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਕਹੈ ਵਿਚਾਰਾ ॥
(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1-8, ਸਫਾ 351)

(Says Nanak, the meek, that He, the lcrd is absorbed in the celestial strains of the heavenly music).

The universe was set in motion by the creator in a tuneful rhythm. In countless galaxies the planets move round the stars at a constant and inflexible speed producing a harmony which is as ineffable as it is eternal. Those who have realised this truth acquire a rare skill with their instruments. Their strings produce a concord which reverberates the music of the spheres. Their music becomes a reflection of the cosmic rhythm. Without this ethereal quality, without this divine inspiration the musician's instrument is no more than a hollow contraption producing discordant notes :

ਹਥਿ ਕਰਿ ਤੰਤੁ ਵਜਾਵੇ ਜੋਗੀ ਥੋਥਰ ਵਾਜੈ ਬੇਨ ॥
(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 4-91, ਸਫਾ 368)

Guru Nanak was a poet, a singer and a musician. He was a divine minstrel commissioned by the Lord of creation :

ਹਉ ਢਾਢੀ ਵੇਕਾਰੁ ਕਾਰੈ ਲਾਇਆ ।.........
ਢਾਢੀ ਸਚੈ ਮਹਲਿ ਖਸਮਿ ਬੁਲਾਇਆ ॥......
ਢਾਢੀ ਕਰੇ ਪਸਾਉ ਸਬਦੁ ਵਜਾਇਆ ॥
(ਵਾਰ ਮਾਝ ਮ: 1-27, ਸਫਾ 150)

(Me, the worthless bard, the Master has taken into His service. The master called the bard into His heavenly presence and commissioned him to sing the Lord's praises.)

The song that this bard sang was exquisite. It had a wonderful refrain of silence. It was by virtue of its ethereal quality that the bard could sing of the unutterable and ineffable bliss :

ਢਾਢੀ ਕਥੈ ਅਕਥੁ ਸਬਦਿ ਸਵਾਰਿਆ ॥
(ਵਾਰ ਮਾਝ ਮ: 1-23, ਸਫਾ 149)

It was through such sublime symphonies of song that he healed the tormented souls of the sinners, making preachers out of thugs and gods out of demons. It was through the miraculous quality of his divine melody that he immobilized the arms that had been swung to stone him to death for violating the commands of shariat by bringing music to Baghdad. The mob that had gathered to punish him was petrified by the magic of his song.

His symphonies leapt like flames that consumed the dross in man's soul and burnished it into beauty and truth. His words were full of prophetic fire :

ਰਾਜੇ ਰਯਤਿ ਸਿਕਦਾਰ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਰਹਸੀਓ ॥
ਹਟ ਪਟਣ ਬਾਜਾਰ ਹੁਕਮੀ ਢਹਸੀਓ ॥
ਪਕੇ ਬੰਕ ਦੁਆਰ ਮੂਰਖ ਜਾਣੈ ਅਪਣੇ ॥
ਦਰਬਿ ਭਰੇ ਭੰਡਾਰ ਰੀਤੇ ਇਕਿ ਖਣੇ ॥
ਤਾਜੀ ਰਥ ਤੁਖਾਰ ਹਾਥੀ ਪਾਖਰੇ ॥
ਬਾਗ ਮਿਲਖ ਘਰ ਬਾਰ ਕਿਥੈ ਸਿ ਆਪਣੈ ॥
ਤੰਬੂ ਪੰਲਘ ਨਿਵਾਰ ਸਰਾਇਚ ਲਾਲਤੀ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਸਚ ਦਾਤਾਰੁ ਸਿਨਾਖਤ ਕਦਰਤੀ ॥

(ਵਾਰ ਮਾਝ ਮ: 1-8, ਸਫਾ 141)

(Of the kings, subjects and chiefs none
shall remain
The shops, cities and streets
shall crumble by the order of God
The solidly built and beautiful mansions
the fool deems his own
The treasures filled with wealth get
emptied in an instant
Stallions, chariots, camels, elephants
gardens, properties, houses, tents
Cotton-tape webbed couches
and satin pavillions shall all be lost.
Sayeth Nanak, the true Lord is the bestower
who is recognised by his omnipresence
in Nature.)

What prophetic vision ! The commonplace language of everyday parlance transmuted by what fiery eloquence ! What a prophetic and vivid portrayal of the fall of kingdoms founded on tyranny and bloodshed ! None could withstand the power of his, words, the lathe-like effect that scraped the rust off human souls and endowed it with a luminous quality. This is what happened to a thug like Sajan when he came in contact with Nanak. His soul had been heavily covered by the rust of his evil deeds. A touch of the revolving grindstone of Nanak's words made it shine like polished steel. Said Nanak to him :

ਅਵਲਿ ਅਉਲਿ ਦੀਨੁ ਕਰਿ ਮਿਠਾ
ਮਸਕਲ ਮਾਨਾ ਮਾਲੁ ਮੁਸਾਵੈ ॥

(ਵਾਰ ਮਾਝ ਮ: 1-1, ਸਫਾ 141)

(First he ought to deem sweet the religion of the Lord's devotees and have his pride of pelf effaced with a scraper.)

Accordingly Sajan thug distributed his ill-gotten wealth among the poor and turned his palatial mansion into a shelter for the homeless.

Nanak's words were the divine symphony translated into language. The source of this divine symphony was the confluence of his own soul with the Supreme being.

ਅਨਹਦ ਸਬਦੁ ਵਜਾਇ ਜੋਤੀ ਜੋਤਿ ਧਰਿ ॥
ਹਿਰਦੈ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਇ ਜੈ ਜੈ ਸਬਦੁ ਹਰਿ ॥

(ਵਾਰ ਸੂਹੀ ਮ: 3-15, ਸਫਾ 790)

It was thus that he rendered into words the unutterable divine truths.

ਕਹੈ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਣਹੁ ਸੰਤਹੁ ਕਥਿਹੁ ਅਕਥ ਕਹਾਣੀ ॥

(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: 3, ਆ; 9, ਸਫਾ 918)

In the words of George Eliot :

"Speech is but broken light on the depths of the unspoken."

This is true of the speech of ordinary mortals. When Nanak spoke the light of his words did not break on the depths of the unspoken. Rather it illumined and revealed these depths. His soul had become the vehicle of divine music. He had attuned it to the Supreme Source. When he played upon the chords of his soul it burst into celestial melodies :

ਆਖਿ ਆਖਿ ਮਨੁ ਵਾਵਣਾ ॥

(ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗੁ ਮ: 1-101, ਸਫਾ 53)

When the soul becomes the divine instrument the mind also joins in the concert and lights up the innermost recesses of our being filling them with ecstacy and bliss :

ਵਾਜਾ ਮਤਿ ਪਖਾਵਜੁ ਭਾਉ ॥
ਹੋਇ ਅਨੰਦੁ ਸਦਾ ਮਨਿ ਚਾਉ ॥

(ਆਸਾ ਮ : 1, ਸਫਾ 350)

(Make thy intellect thy musical instrument and make love thy tambourin. Thus thou shall attain eternal ecstacy and bliss).

Music that is not produced by the harp of the human mind or the lyre of the human soul has its origin in human ego. This is the essential distinction between the quality of the divine symphony and the modulated sounds produced by a musical instrument. The latter keep the musicians filled with an awareness of self importance and self-conceit. About such performances it is said :

ਹਉਮੈ ਵਿਚ ਗਾਵਿਹ ਬਿਰਥਾ ਜਾਇ ॥

(ਗਉੜੀ ਮ : 3-24, ਸਫਾ 158)

Music that is based on ego may be perfect in intonation and instrumental skill but it lacks depth. It lacks that exquisite cadence which alone can sing the ineffable songs. Such music cannot enchant the human soul :

ਇਕਿ ਗਾਵਤ ਰਹੈ ਮਨਿ ਸਾਦੁ ਨ ਪਇ ॥

(ਗਉੜੀ ਮ: 3-24, ਸਫਾ 158)

When a master musician sings, his notes do not merely reverberate in the air. The ambrosial quality of those notes fills the atmosphere with a rare fragrance. His liquid melody gradually becomes tenuous and rarified and the pervasive quality of his music fills the air with a dewy moisture. The refreshing fragrance of his song gently steals into the human soul and fills it up with glistening dew drops. What is the source of such ambrosial music ? Says Nanak :

ਰਾਗ ਰਤਨ ਪਰੀਆ ਪਰਵਾਰ ॥ ਤਿਸੁ ਵਿਚਿ ਉਪਜੈ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਾਰ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਕਰਤੇ ਕਾ ਇਹੁ ਧਨੁ ਮਾਲੁ ॥ ਜੇ ਕੋ ਬੂਝੈ ਏਹੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੁ ॥

(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1-9 ਸਫਾ, 351)

(The Divine music with its consorts and lineage is a gem. From within that the essence of ambrosia is produced. Says Nanak, if some one thinks it over he will realise that such music is the wealth and property of the creator.)

What effect does this heavenly music have on the listeners. Its fragrant dew seeps into their barren souls and fills the desolate regions with greenery and vegetation. The vast deserts blossom forth into valleys of flowers.

ਹਰਿ ਉਤਮੁ ਹਰਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਗਾਵਿਆ
ਕਰਿ ਨਾਦੁ ਬਿਲਾਵਲੁ ਰਾਗੁ ॥
ਸਭੁ ਤਨੁ ਮਨੁ ਹਰਿਆ ਹੋਇਆ
ਮਨੁ ਖਿੜਿਆ ਹਰਿਆ ਬਾਗੁ ॥
ਅਗਿਆਨੁ ਅੰਧੇਰਾ ਮਿਟਿ ਗਇਆ
ਗੁਰ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਚਰਾਗੁ ॥

(ਬਿਲਾਵਲ ਵਾਰ ਮ: 4-1, ਸਫਾ 849)

(When a divine minstrel sings the praise of the Lord in Raga Bilawal he lets loose an enchanted stream that slakes the thirst of parched souls. His music opens up vistas of spring flowers that revive the drooping human spirit).

It was for a draught of such enchanted music that Shelley's soul languished when he wrote :

I pant for the music which is divine,
My heart in its thirst is a dying flower;
Pour forth the sound like enchanted wine,
Loosen the notes in a silver shower;
Like a herbless plain, for the gentle rain,
I gasp, I faint, till they wake again.

[Shelley]

Guru Nanak visited not only Baghdad but journeyed to many distant lands and came in contact with prominent leaders of the various religious sects. He met Hindu acharyas and Muslim pirs and sheikhs. Tradition has it that even Kalyug came to meet the divine master.

The world has known many famous travellers who travelled long distances and visited far-flung lands. If the distances covered by Guru Nanak during his four sojourns were to be added up it would perhaps excel many known records. Of his long travels, Guru Nanak said :

ਤਟ ਤੀਰਥ ਹਮ ਨਵਖੰਡ ਦੇਖੇ ਹਟ ਪਟਣ ਬਾਜਾਰਾ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਮਹਲਾ 1-17, ਸਫਾ 156)

(I have seen many countries and continents and have visited several places of pilgrimage, trading and marketing centres.)

What was the quintessence of the experience gathered by Guru Nanak during his travels ? Speaking of the learned people he came across Guru Nanak summed up his observations in these words :

ਜਗਿ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਵਿਰਲਾ ਆਚਾਰੀ ॥
ਜਗਿ ਪੰਡਿਤੁ ਵਿਰਲਾ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ ॥
(ਆਸਾ ਮਹਲਾ 1. ਅਸਟ : 3, ਸਫਾ 413)

(The world is full of learned men but of them there are few who have imbibed learning and made it a part of character)

This verdict of Guru Nanak has been elaborated by Bhai Gurdas in the following lines :

"ਬਾਬਾ ਆਇਆ ਤੀਰਥੀਂ ਤੀਰਥ ਪੁਰਬ ਸਭੇ ਫਿਰਿ ਦੇਖੈ ॥.........
ਕਲਿਜੁਗਿ ਧੁੰਧੂਕਾਰ ਹੈ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਈ ਬਹੁਬਿਧਿ ਭੇਖੈ ॥.........
ਹਉਮੈ ਅੰਦਰ ਸਭਿ ਕੋ ਡੁਬੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਣੇ ਬਹੁ ਚੇਲੇ ॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਦਿਸਈ ਢੂੰਡੇ ਤੀਰਥ ਜਾਤ੍ਰੀ ਮੇਲੇ ॥
ਡਿਠੇ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੁਰਕਿ ਸਭਿ ਪੀਰ ਪੈਕੰਬਰ ਕਉਮਿ ਕਤੇਲੇ ॥
ਅੰਧੀ ਅੰਧੇ ਖੂਹੇ ਠੇਲੇ ॥
(ਵਾਰ 1, ਪਉੜੀ 25-26, ਸਫਾ 21-22)

(Guru Nanak visited many pilgrim centres and saw many festivals being celebrated there. In this dark age of Kalyug he found the masses being misled into superstition by the so-called holy men in various garbs. All these preceptors were themselves sunk into the morass of egotism and were also pulling their disciples into it. In his search for a man of god the Guru went to places of pilgrimage and looked among throngs of pilgrims but his search came to naught. He met the leaders of various Hindu and Muslim sects but he only found the blind leading the blind)

Guru Nanak did not mince words while giving his verdict. His conclusions were very terse emphatic and unequivocal. The learned men about whom he spoke were those who had renounced the householder's way of life to follow the path of divine knowledge. They believed that there could be no salvation without divine knowledge, no divine knowledge without disillusionment with the world and no disillusionment without renunciation.

All the ascetics and hermits belonged to this class of renunciants. The term Gyani used by Guru Nanak included sanyasis, yogis, Budhist monks, Digamber Jain Sadhus, dervishes and sufi fakirs. Guru Nanak passed a judgement on the contemporary gyanis. According to gurbani only he is in a position to pass judgement on others who has first adjudged himself :

ਨਾਨਕ ਪਰਖੇ ਆਪ ਕਉ ਤਾ ਪਾਰਖੁ ਜਾਣੁ ॥
(ਮਾਝ ਮਹਲਾ 2-22, ਸਫਾ 148)

According to Guru Nanak only he can be truly called a Gyani who possesses the touchstone of self assessment. He who has not realised himself is yet far away from divine knowledge.

ਪ੍ਰਣਵਤਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕੈਸਾ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਆਪੁ ਪਛਾਣੈ ਬੂਝੈ ਸੋਇ ॥
(ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗ ਮਹਲਾ, 1-30 ਸਫਾ 25)

The learned men of Guru Nanak's time failed to realise themselves because they had not subjected themselves to the process of self assessment. Therefore not withstanding all their learning they remained devoid of divine knowledge. The process of self-assessment is a difficult one. It is easy to call oneself Brahm but such arrogation merely inflates the ego. Such a person thinks that he has attained Smadhi when he is only in a nightmarish grip of self-delusion created by his ego. It was for such seekers that Guru Arjan sounded the warning :

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਸਦਾ ਸਦ ਜਾਗਤ ॥
ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਅਹੰਬੁਧਿ ਤਿਆਗਤ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖ: ਮ: 5, 8, 5, ਸਫਾ 273)

(One who has truly attained divine knowledge discards ego and remains forever awake in spirit.)

The path of divine knowledge is an arduous one. Only brave spirits can embark upon it. The ascetics and hermits of Guru Nanak's time did not belong to this category. Their main object in renouncing the householder's life was to escape the oppressor's yoke. The tyranny of Afghan and Mughul rulers drove many people to renunciation. It made life much easier. They did not have to earn a living. They had only to stretch out their palm for alms. It was the householder's duty to provide food for monks and mendicants. Holy men stretching their hands before householders is antithetical to the teachings of the Sikh gurus. According to the Sikh philosophy a holy man extends his hand only to bless others, not to beg for food. He is the bestower, not the beggar, the giver, not the receiver :

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਅਨਾਥ ਕਾ ਨਾਥੁ ॥
ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕਾ ਸਭ ਊਪਰਿ ਹਾਥੁ ॥

(ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖ: 5, 8, 8, ਸਫਾ 273)

(A truly holy man extends his hand of protection over all. He is the comfort of the weak and hapless.)

Had the ascetics and recluses of those times been capable of self assessment they would have soon realized their folly. Lacking the capacity for self analysis they were led astray from the right path of divine knowledge. Sayeth Nanak :

ਪ੍ਰਣਵਤਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕੈਸਾ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਆਪੁ ਪਛਾਣੈ ਬੂਝੈ ਸੋਇ ॥

(ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗ ਮ: 1-30, ਸਫਾ 25)

(Only he who knows himself is truly versed in spiritual learning and only he can realise Truth.)

The Sikh gurus did not approve of those who put on the garbs of holymen only to escape from the stark realities of life. According to the gurus a truly enlightened person is he who is humble in spirit and whose heart is the main spring of altruism and goodwill for humanity.

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕੈ ਗਰੀਬੀ ਸਮਾਹਾ ॥
ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰ ਉਮਾਹਾ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖ: ਮ: 5, 8-4 ਸਫਾ, 273)

He who has not the courage to face life and its responsibilities, he who is an escapist and a burden on society cannot acquire spiritual knowledge. Only he can do so who stands steadfast in the face of every catastrophe and is never crestfallen :

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਕੈ ਧੀਰਜੁ ਏਕ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖ: ਮ: 5, 8-8 ਸਫਾ, 272)

(A truly learned man never loses hope and faith in God).

A Gyani's courage, his fortitude and determination is seldom shaken. The Gyanis of Guru Nanak's time were cowards in the guise of holy men. They singularly lacked character and courage.

Guru Nanak's verdict upon the Gyanis was equally applicable to the Pandits. The Pandits differed from the Gyanis in that the former were not recluses but householders. The Pandits were learned in religious lore and the masses looked upto them for guidance. Their learning, however, got contaminated with greed and self-interest. It was reduced to an instrument for satisfying their worldly needs. Thus their knowledge degenerated into folly.

A wise man has said :

"Men are born ignorant, but not stupid. Education makes them stupid."

Education makes a man stupid when he starts using it as a tool to serve his worldly ends. Shastras become means for satisfying his greed. About such learned men Guru Nanak says :

ਪੜਿਆ ਮੂਰਖੁ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਸੁ ਲਬੁ ਲੋਭੁ ਅਹੰਕਾਰਾ ॥
(ਮਾਝ ਵਾਰ ਮ: 1-6, ਸਫਾ 140)

(He may be learned but he is no better than a fool if he has not been able to get rid of his greed and pride.)

True learning is that which teaches that our personal good is indivisible from the general good and our personal interest can be served through the general welfare of humanity. It is only when this truth is realised that learning becomes a vehicle for serving makind. Only those who make learning a part of their mental and spiritual make-up feel inspired through it to work for the happiness of mankind.

ਵਿਦਿਆ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ ਤਾਂ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੀ ॥
(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1-25, ਸਫਾ 356)

(He who has truly absorbed knowledge in his being can become the benefactor of all.)

A Pandit who does not make learning a part of his being can use it only for self interest. He cannot develop a philosophic and detached attitude to the pitfalls of life which is the true purpose of all learning. Guru Nanak had this to say about such Pandits :

ਪੰਡਿਤ ਵਾਚਹਿ ਪੋਥੀਆ ਨਾਂ ਬੂਝਹਿ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥
ਅਨ ਕਉ ਮਤੀ ਦੇ ਚਲਹਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾ ਵਾਪਾਰੁ ॥
(ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗ ਮ: 1, ਅਸ਼ਟ: 5, ਸਫਾ 56)

(A Pandit may master big volumes but unless he imbibes their meaning in his own life he would be merely trading precepts for money).

Had the object of true learning been properly understood, knowledge would have led to wisdom. Learning would not have merely sharpened the intellect but also endowed it with the faculty, to distinguish between good and evil. It is only such learning which enables human spirit to experience ecstacy and bliss. As Guru Ram Dass says :

ਬਿਬੇਕ ਬੁਧਿ ਸਭ ਜਗ ਮਹਿ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਬਿਚਿਰ ਬਿਚਿਰ ਰਸੁ ਪੀਜੈ ॥
(ਕਲਿਆਨ ਮ: 4, ਅਸ਼ਟ: 4, ਸਫਾ 1325)

Learning which is bereft of this quality dwarfs the human spirit by drying up the springs of emotion. It involves the Pandit in unprofitable controversies, forgetting the inner reality :

ਪੜਿ ਪੜਿ ਪੰਡਿਤੁ ਬਾਦੁ ਵਖਾਣੈ ॥
ਭੀਤਰਿ ਹੋਂਦੀ ਵਸਤੁ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ।
(ਗਉੜੀ ਮ: 1-4, ਸਫਾ 152)

Learning which is preoccupied with dialectics and which revels in academic skirmishes fails to achieve its true purpose. Learning is not an intellectual chess. It has a high moral purpose. The Sikh gurus laid great emphasis on this moral purpose of learning :

ਸਤੀ ਪਹਰੀ ਸਤੁ ਭਲਾ ਬਹੀਐ ਪੜਿਆ ਪਾਸਿ ॥
ਓਥੈ ਪਾਪੁ ਪੁੰਨੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੀਐ ਕੂੜੈ ਘਟੈ ਰਾਸਿ ॥
(ਵਾਰ ਮਾਝ ਮ: 2-18, ਸਫਾ 146)

(The commodity of falsehood in human heart is diminished by deliberating on good and evil in the company of truly learned men.)

Centuries later the same thought was expressed by the German philosopher Kant in the following words :

"The purely intellectual use of reason leads to fallacy. Its only right use is directed to moral ends."

Truly, therefore, the quintessence of Guru Nanak's experience gathered during his travels to distant lands was

ਜਗਿ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਵਿਰਲਾ ਆਚਾਰੀ ॥
ਜਗਿ ਪੰਡਿਤੁ ਵਿਰਲਾ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ ॥ (ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1, ਸਫਾ 413)

(The world is full of men of learning but there are few men of character. The world is full of people who preach but very few who deliberate upon those precepts).

In these words Guru Nanak painted a true picture of the holy men of his days, whether they were gyanis, or pandits, recluses or householders. Guru Nanak was the prophet of Kalyug. About this dark age Bhai Gurdas wrote :

ਕਲਿਜੁਗਿ ਧੁੰਧੂਕਾਰ ਹੈ ਭਰਮਿ ਭੁਲਾਈ ਬਹੁ ਬਿਧਿ ਭੇਖੇ ॥
(ਵਾਰ 1-25, ਸਫਾ 21)

(Kalyug is the age of darkness in which holy men in various garbs mislead people into superstition).

About the lot of householders in Kalyug Guru Nanak said :

ਕਲੀ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਜਿੰਨਾ ਦਾ ਅਉਤਾਰੁ ॥
ਪੁਤੁ ਜਿਨੂਰਾ ਧੀਅ ਜਿੰਨੂਰੀ ਜੋਰੂ ਜਿੰਨਾ ਦਾ ਸਿਕਦਾਰੁ ॥
(ਵਾਰ ਬਿਹਾ:, ਸਲੋਕ ਮ: 1, ਸਫਾ 556)

He had also this to say about Kalyug and its distorted values :

ਖੋਟੇ ਕਉ ਖਰਾ ਕਹੈ ਖਰੇ ਸਾਰ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ॥
ਅੰਧੇ ਕਾ ਨਾਉ ਪਾਰਖੂ ਕਲਿਕਾਲ ਵਿਡਾਣੈ ॥
ਮੀਠੇ ਕਉ ਕਉੜਾ ਕਹੈ ਕੜੂਏ ਕਉ ਮੀਠਾ ॥
ਰਾਤੇ[1] ਕੀ ਨਿੰਦਾ ਕਰਹਿ ਐਸਾ ਕਲਿ ਮਹਿ ਡੀਠਾ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਮ: 1 ਅਸ਼ਟ-18, ਸਫਾ 229)

(The counterfeit is called genuine and the worth of the genuine is not realized. In this wonderful age Kalyug a blind man is regarded as the judge of things. What is sweet is called bitter and the bitter is called sweet.
Those imbued with Lord's love are maligned. This I have seen in the Dark age).

In Kalyug only self-interest and egotism prevail. No one is bothered about gaining spiritual merit. Those who meditate on God are called hypocrites.

ਜੇ ਕੋ ਸਤੁ ਕਰੈ ਸੋ ਛੀਜੈ ਤਪ ਘਰਿ ਤਪੁ ਨ ਹੋਈ ॥
ਜੇ ਕੋ ਨਾਉ ਲਏ ਬਦਨਾਵੀ ਕਲਿ ਕੇ ਲਖਣ ਏਈ ॥
(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: 1, ਅਸਟ:-1, ਸਫਾ 902)

(If any one practices truth he is frustrated and glory does not come to godly men. If any one utters the Lord's Name he is maligned. These are the characteristics of the Dark age)

Such was the condition of the learned men, the holy men and the householders in Guru Nanak's time. What were the kings like in those days ? In this age of democracy it is difficult to form an idea of the conditions under the autocratic rulers, in those days. The rulers really ruled. Today it is the people who rule through their elected representatives. In Guru Nanak's time the kings were like tigers and the revenue officials were like hounds :

'ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ'

In this age of democracy it is the people, not the kings, who roar like lions. However, the mentality of the officials has not undergone any substantial change. Guru Nanak wrote that in his times nothing moved without bribing the officials. Just claims remained pending until palms had been greased. Even the king did not administer justice unless the supplicant had paid him his share of the tainted money :

ਲਏ ਦਿਤੇ ਵਿਣੁ ਰਹੈ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥
ਰਾਜਾ ਨਿਆਉ ਕਰੇ ਹਥਿ ਹੋਇ ॥ (ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1, ਸਫਾ 350)

For those who were indigent and had nothing to oil the official machinery or to contribute to the royal coffers there was no hope. They could not obtain justice by merely invoking God, by seeking personal interview with the ruler or by appealing to his mercy

ਦਰਸਨਿ ਦੇਖਿਐ ਦਇਆ ਨ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਕਹੈ ਖੁਦਾਇ ਨ ਮਾਨੈ ਕੋਇ ॥3॥
ਮਾਣਸ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਨਾਮੁ ॥
ਕਰਣੀ ਕੁਤਾ ਦਰਿ ਫੁਰਮਾਨ ॥

(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1-4, ਸਫਾ.350)

(The sight of the petitioner does not produce pity, nor is the ruler moved if the petitioner utters the name of God. Sayeth Nanak, men are men only in form and name, in their deeds they are no better than dogs.)

So merciless and blood thirsty were the rulers of those times that Guru Nanak has compared them to butchers :

ਕਲਿ ਕਾਤੀ ਰਾਜੇ ਕਾਸਾਈ
ਧਰਮੁ ਪੰਖ ਕਰਿ ਉਡਰਿਆ ॥

(ਵਾਰ ਮਾਝ, ਮ: 1-6, ਸਫਾ 145)

(The kings are butchers and the Dark age is like the butcher's knife. Righteousness has taken wings and has flown away.)

These words of Guru Nanak are significant and raise a vital issue. He goes on to say :

ਕੂੜੁ ਅਮਾਵਸ ਸਚੁ ਚੰਦ੍ਰਮਾ ਦੀਸੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਹ ਚੜਿਆ ॥
ਹਉ ਭਾਲਿ ਵਿਕੁੰਨੀ ਹੋਈ ॥
ਆਧੇਰੈ ਰਾਹੁ ਨ ਕੋਈ ॥
ਵਿਚਿ ਹਉਮੈ ਕਰਿ ਦੁਖੁ ਰੋਈ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਿਨਿ ਬਿਧਿ ਗਤਿ ਹੋਈ ॥

(ਵਾਰ ਮਾਝ, ਮ: 1-19, ਸਫਾ 145)

(In this moonless night of falsehood the moon of truth is not seen to rise anywhere. In my search I have become bewildered. In darkness I find no path. Sunk in egotism mortals bewail in pain. Says Nanak, by what means can the mortals be delivered ?)

What is the way out of this pitch darkness ? Where lies deliverance for the ego-shackled humanity. These are questions that Guru Nanak raised. It seems to me that the entire Sikh ethos and philosophy is an effort to find answer to these questions. The point at issue is whether over the last four centuries we have been able to transcend Kalyug and find a way out of its moonless night. Have we been able to meet the challenges of this dark age ?

In 'Puratan Janam Sakhi' the story of Kalyug is told in the following words :

"Then it presented itself in the garb of a human being. Folding its hands it stood meekly before Guru Nanak.

'Who art thou ?' asked the Guru.

'Don't thou know me ?' it replied, 'I am Kalyug and I have come to see thee."

The appearance of Kalyug in human form and its meeting with Guru Nanak is recorded in a very interesting manner. The account becomes all the more absorbing when we read about the earlier disguises in which Kalyug appeared before the Guru. The description given in the Puratan Janam Sakhi is as follows :

"Then a terrible storm started blowing. It uprooted huge trees and made them fly in the air. Mardana was struck with terror. Said he, 'My lord Guru wherefore hath thou brought me to die in this wilderness where I will not get even a shroud and a grave.' The Guru Baba said, 'Take heart Mardana and don't be afraid.' Then Mardana replied, 'In all my life I have not seen such infernal fury. It will stop only after killing me.' Then the storm changed to a great fire. Thick smoke arose and huge flames leapt up to the sky in all directions. Seeing this Mardana covered his face and lay down on the ground. Said he, 'Now is death certain for me'."

It is surprising that Mardana should have been so mortally afraid of Kalyug. Mardana should not have known fear for even his name testified to his courage and manliness. The truth is that Mardana was not conscious of his own valour. In reality he was more than a match for Kalyug but he did not realise his strength. He was accomplished in an art which ensured victory over Kalyug. Kalyug has a weak and vulnerable spot. Any one who can put his finger on this spot can vanquish Kalyug. Guru Nanak came to this mortal world to reveal this secret to humanity. He came to put Mardana, and through Mardana the entire mankind on the alert against the sinister power of Kalyug. Only the true and omniscient Guru knew the secret of Kalyug's weakness and by revealing it he saved humanity.

ਕਲੀ ਕਾਲ ਮਹਿ ਇਕ ਕਲ ਰਾਖੀ ॥
ਬਿਨੁ ਗੁਰ ਪੂਰੇ ਕਿਨੈ ਨ ਭਾਖੀ ॥
(ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1024)

(In Kalyug humanity is left with only one power which can be revealed by none except the perfect Guru.)

What is this power before which Kalyug succumbs ? Guru Amar Das has further clarified this concept :

ਕਲਿ ਕੀਰਤਿ ਪਰਗਟੁ ਚਾਨਣੁ ਸੰਸਾਰਿ ॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕੋਈ ਉਤਰੈ ਪਾਰਿ ॥
(ਮਾਝ ਵਾਰ, ਮ: 3, ਪੰਨਾ 145)

It is Kirtan which is the source of that divine light in which the seeker finds the true path. Kirtan, Guru Amar Das went on to say, is that peerless gem which reflects divine light in the pitch darkness of Kalyug. This jewel is bestowed only on those who are blessed by God's Grace :

ਜਿਸਨੋ ਨਦਰਿ ਕਰੇ ਤਿਸੁ ਦੇਵੈ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਰਤਨੁ ਸੋ ਲੇਵੈ ॥
(ਵਾਰ ਮਾਝ, ਮ: 3, ਪੰਨਾ 145)

(Only he can get this jewel on whom His heavenly Grace descends.)

The fifth Master Guru Arjan proclaimed that of all the epochs Kalyug is the best :

ਸਤਿਜੁਗੁ ਤ੍ਰੇਤਾ ਦੁਆਪੁਰ ਭਣੀਐ ਕਲਿਜੁਗੁ ਊਤਮੋ ਜੁਗਾ ਮਾਹਿ ॥
(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 5-406)

In Vishnu Puran the following characteristics of Kalyug have been mentioned :

"In Kalyug he who acquires power will be accepted as the master regardless of his caste and family background. Whatever he says will be revered as scriptural truth. Due to shortage of gold and precious stones most women in Kalyug will embellish themselves by adopting fanciful hair styles. In Kalyug people will squander all their money in constructing palatial houses and will not keep anything to give in charity. In Kalyug the low caste people will grow so bold as to claim equality with high caste Brahmins. Cows will be shown veneration according to their milk yield. In Kalyug it will not be unusual for people to take their meals without a bath. The ascetics will no longer be content to eat forest produce but will beg for food at the householder's door. Even after renunciation of the world the recluses will not be able to snap the worldly ties completely. In Kalyug the kings shall not be genuinely interested in the welfare of their subjects. They will only use it as an excuse to rob them of their money by imposing high taxes. In Kalyug people will be cruel, evil hearted and absorbed in empty ritual."

Many other features of Kalyug are discussed in detail in Vishnu Puran. The above mentioned are the salient ones. The superiority of Kalyug over the preceding ages is also brought out in Vishnu Puran through an anecdote. It is written that once upon a time a controversy arose among some sages about the relative merit gained in various ages through performing good deeds. In order to resolve the controversy the sages went to Vyas who was the wisest among them. Seeing that Vyas was having his bath in the holy Ganges they sat down near by and waited. The great sage Vyas took a dip in the Ganges. Then as his head emerged from water he shouted :—

"Kalyug is supreme !"

Vyas had another dip in the Ganges and coming out said,

"Praised be the low caste for they are supreme !"

After the third dip he said,

"Praised be the women for they are supreme !" As Vyas finished his bath the sages approached him. He offered them seats according to the spiritual merit attained by each and enquired about their welfare.

"We had come," said the sages, "to resolve one point of doubt. However your words have raised fresh doubts in our minds. Your exclamations that in Kalyug, the low caste and women are supreme and worthy of praise and veneration, are somewhat enigmatic. We request you to elucidate the meaning thereof."

Then Vyas spoke to them.

"The spiritual merit which a seeker gained in Satyug after ten years of meditation and celibacy, which took him one year in Treta and one month in Dwapar can be acquired in Kalyug in one day only. This is why I called Kalyug supreme. The reward which an aspirant could get through concentration of mind in Satyug, through performance of yagnas in Treta through worship of deities in Dwapar can now be obtained by simply singing hymns in praise of Lord Krishna.[2] In Kalyug the spiritual gains and rewards are quick and ample. So I am most content with this epoch. Now I come to the low caste people. Those belonging to the high castes have to observe celibacy, study the Vedas and spend large sums of money on performance of yagnas. These yagnas involve futile discourses and wasteful eating. The elaborate ritual has to be performed strictly according to the injunctions of the Shastras. Any omission or commission can jeopardize their salvation and land them in endless trouble. They have to be very circumspect to ensure that they do not violate any textual tenets. The low caste people do not have to go through all this. They can earn salvation for themselves by merely serving the high caste people. That is why I said that the low caste are supreme. Now I come to women. Men have to labour hard and undergo no end of trouble to earn their living. It is further incumbent on them that out of their savings they should give in charity and spend on religious ceremonies. Again it is men who have to face the consequences of squandering their money on unworthy objects. The women on the other hand are exempt from all these responsibilities. They can easily attain salvation by serving their husbands with fidelity and love. Thus like the low caste people the women are also supreme."

Kalyug has also been mentioned in several Shastras, Puranas and tantric texts. Kalki Puran described the genesis of Kalyug. It is written that out of a conjugal connection between 'Heresy' and 'Illusion' a son called 'Fraud' was born. This 'Fraud' begot a son called 'Greed' who in turn sired a son called 'Anger'. It was 'Anger' that brought forth a progeny called 'Kalyug'. In the Holy Granth it is mentioned that Kalyug was fathered by a barbarian (ਚੰਡਾਲ) :

ਇਸੁ ਕਲਿਜੁਗ ਮਹਿ ਕਰਮ ਧਰਮੁ ਨ ਕੋਈ ॥
ਕਲੀ ਕਾ ਜਨਮੁ ਚੰਡਾਲ ਕੈ ਘਰਿ ਹੋਈ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਮ: 3, ਪੰਨਾ 161)

(In Kalyug there are neither pious principles nor good deeds, for Kalyug has been born in the house of barbarian).

In another place in the Holy Granth 'Anger' has been called a barbarian :

ਓਨਾ ਪਾਸਿ ਦੁਆਸਿ ਨ ਭਿਟੀਐ ॥
ਜਿਨ੍ਹ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੁ ਚੰਡਾਲ ॥ 34 ॥
(ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗ ਮ: 4, ਪੰਨਾ 40)

(A true seeker should avoid the company of those who harbour in them the barbarian called 'Anger').

This logic proves the theory expounded in Kalki Puran that Kalyug was born to 'Anger'. This genesis is further stressed in the Holy Granth :

ਹੇ ਕਲਿ ਮੂਲਿ ਕ੍ਰੋਧੰ ਕਦੰਚ ਕਰੁਣਾ ਨ ਉਪਰਜਤੇ ॥
(ਸਲੋਕ ਸਹਸਕ੍ਰਿਤੀ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 1358)

All shastras have discussed the strategy to vanquish Kalyug.

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In *Manu Samhita* it is written :

'Whereas in Satyug salvation can be earned through meditation, in Treta through enlightenment and in Dwapar by performance of Yagnas, in Kalyug it is attained mainly through charity."

According to Shiv Puran the most effective means is the worship of Lord Shiva. The Skand Puran extols the virtues of a pilgrimage to Kashi. It is written that by merely residing in Kashi all his life a Brahmin can escape the sins of Kalyug and attain supreme bliss. In Bhavishya Puran it is stated that in Kalyug the Ganges is the sole place of pilgrimage. To quote—

"In Satyug all pilgrim centres, in Treta only Pushkar, in Dwapar only Kurukshetra and in Kalyug only the Ganges should be regarded as a place of pilgrimage."

In short all ancient texts are agreed that Kalyug is an evil age but its main redeeming feature is that it makes salvation easy of attainment. Different means have been advocated by the various Shastras and Simrtis. The Purans do mention meditation on God's name and singing of His praises as a means to spiritual elevation but the idea gets mixed up with so much of dross that the real substance is lost. Here and there we get a glimpse of the truth in the ancient texts but the truth soon gets covered by a thick overburden of superstition. It was left to Guru Nanak to remove the overburden and to smelt the precious ore into the gold of the glorious truth. It was he who put the soul of humanity in tune with the music of the Universe :

ਅਨਹਦ ਧੁਨੀ ਦਰਿ ਵਜਦੇ ਦਰਿ ਸਚੈ ਸੋਭਾ ਪਾਇ ॥
(ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗੁ ਮ: 4, ਪੰਨਾ 42)

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It was Guru Nanak who made divine music a vehicle for the deliverence of mankind and for taking it across Kalyug's stormy ocean of fire. Guru Arjan was referring to Guru Nanak when he wrote :

ਮਹਾ ਬਿਖਮੁ ਅਗਨਿ ਕਾ ਸਾਗੁਰੁ ਤਿਸਤੇ ਪਾਰਿ ਉਤਾਰਿਓ ॥
ਪੇਖਿ ਪੇਖਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਿਗਸਾਨੋ ਪੁਨਹ ਪੁਨਹ ਬਲਿਹਾਰਿਓ ॥
(ਨਟ ਨਾਰਾਇਣ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 979)

Also when he wrote :

ਗੁਰੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਾਕਉ ਭਇਆ ਦਇਆਲਾ ॥
ਸੋ ਜਨੁ ਹੋਆ ਸਦਾ ਨਿਹਾਲਾ ॥
(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 396)

(He on whom Guru Nanak's grace descends is blessed with perpetual bliss.)

The great Urdu poet Iqbal also paid the following tribute to Guru Nanak :

ਫਿਰ ਉਠੀ ਆਖ਼ਰ ਸਦਾ ਤੌਹੀਦ ਕੀ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਸੇ,
ਹਿੰਦ ਕੋ ਇਕ ਮਰਦੇ ਕਾਮਲ ਨੇ ਜਗਾਯਾ ਖ਼ਾਬ ਸੇ ॥

(At last the voice of monotheism was raised from the Punjab and a superman aroused India from the nightmare of superstition)

This superman, according to Iqbal, was Guru Nanak.

It was this voice of monotheism which Guru Nanak raised in Baghdad. He enriched this voice with the mellifluous tones of music. Music is the divine cosmic melody, the very heart throb of creation.

Says Carlyle :

"See deep enough and you see musically; the heart of nature being everywhere music, if you can only reach it."

(Carlyle, Hero & Hero Worship)

This divine cosmic melody is beyond the reach of human beings. Had it been otherwise man would have readily perceived that the essence of music is no different from love which pervades the entire creation.

ਜੱਤ੍ਰ ਤੱਤ੍ਰ ਦਿਸਾ ਵਿਸਾ ਹੋਇ ਫੈਲਿਓ ਅਨੁਰਾਗ ॥
(ਜਾਪੁ ਸਾਹਿਬ, 80)

How to bring the divine melody within the range of human grasp. Guru Nanak achieved this by operating the fourth key which Farabi's instrument lacked. Through the voice of monotheism musically intoned he transported the people of Baghdad into the very heart-beat of creation.

Plato had said :

"Music and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul."

(The Republic, Book III)

Guru Nanak preached the message of monotheism through musical cadences. His preachings reverberated through the human spirit in the form of a symphony. In Kalyug music and meditation were to become indivisible. It was to this indivisibility that Guru Arjan pointed out when he wrote :

ਕਲਜੁਗ ਮਹਿ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਪਰਧਾਨਾ ॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਜਪੀਐ ਲਾਇ ਧਿਆਨਾ ॥

(ਮਾਰੂ ਸੋਲਹੇ, ਮ: 5-5, ਸਫਾ 1075-76)

(In Kalyug *Kirtan*, singing of hymns, is supreme and the true seeker achieves concentration in meditation only through music.)

He clarified this point further :

ਕੀਰਤਨ ਨਾਮੁ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਰਹਉ ਜਬ ਲਗੁ ਘਟਿ ਸਾਸੁ ॥

(ਬਿਲਾਵਲ ਮ: 5-7, ਸਫਾ 818)

(Till the last breath in your body meditate on God musically).

Bhai Vir Singh also stressed the intrinsic oneness of meditation and kirtan :

ਯਾਦ ਸਜਣ ਦੀ ਹਰਦਮ ਰਹਿੰਦੀ ਲਹਿ ਗਈ ਡੂੰਘੇ ਥਾਈਂ
ਵਾਂਗ ਸੰਗੀਤ ਲਹਿਰਦੀ ਅੰਦਰ ਬਣ ਗਈ 'ਰਾਗ ਇਲਾਹੀ'
ਦਾਰੂ ਵਾਂਗ ਸਰੂਰ ਚਾੜ੍ਹਦੀ ਤਰਬ ਵਾਂਗ ਥੱਰਰਾਵੇ
ਖਿਚੇ ਤੇ ਰਸਭਿੰਨੀ ਕਸਕੇ, ਲਗੇ ਫਿਰ ਸੁਖਦਾਈ ।

(ਤ੍ਰੇਲ ਤੁਪਕੇ)

(The memory of my heavenly beloved, forever present with me, sinks deep into my soul. Quivering in ecstatic notes it was transformed into a divine melody. Tingling tremulously like a tuned harp, it made me feel inebriated. And though it fills my heart with poignancy, yet it is sweet and blissful).

When Guru Nanak visited Baghdad, he was accompanied by Mardana, who was his life long companion, inseparable and ever present. Was Mardana only a devotee and disciple of the Guru or was he something more than that ? He was certainly different from the other disciples in one respect. He was more of a comrade and a friend with whom the Guru could be informal and intimate. Even great prophets have need of comrades and friends. According to Hindu mythology Bhagwan Krishna once came to the rescue of the gods in a battle against demons. But for this timely help the gods would have been vanquished. As a token of their gratitude the gods wanted to bestow a boon on Krishna, but Krishna lacked nothing. He was omnipotent and himself a giver of boons, yet he asked for a boon. He was afraid that unless he did so the gods would take offence and might inflict a curse on him. He bowed before the gods and said beseechingly :

"Pray grant me this boon that my friendship with Arjun should be life long."

Lord Krishna was worshiped as God. Lakhshmi, the godess of wealth was at his beck and call. He had attained command over occult powers. If there was anything he needed it was a lasting friendship with Arjuna. Perhaps Kabir was also searching for a similar friendship when he wrote :

ਕਬੀਰ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਹਉ ਫਿਰਿਓ ਮਾਂਦਲੁ ਕੰਧ ਚਢਾਇ ॥
ਕੋਈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕੋ ਨਹੀਂ ਸਭ ਦੇਖੀ ਠੋਕਿ ਬਜਾਇ ॥ 13 ॥
(ਸਲੋਕ ਕਬੀਰ, ਸਫਾ 1370)

(I searched the whole world for a true friend. I carried a drum on my shoulders and kept beating it to make my intention known. I put all I came across to test and found them lacking in sincerity).

Baba Farid's anguish at being friendless was even deeper :

ਫ਼ਰੀਦਾ ਗਲੀਂ ਸੁ ਸਜਣ ਵੀਹ ਇਕੁ ਢੂੰਢੇਦੀ ਨ ਲਹਾਂ ॥
ਧੁਖਾਂ ਜਿਉ ਮਾਂਲੀਹ ਕਾਰਣਿ ਤਿੰਨਾ ਮਾ ਪਿਰੀ ॥
(ਸਲੋਕ ਫ਼ਰੀਦ. ਸਫਾ 1382)

(Pining for a true friend I smoulder as though in a low fire. There are a score of them who talk glibly of their fidelity but not a single one who is as good as his word).

Guru Amar Dass exhorts us to inculcate and cherish the friendship of men of God :

ਗੁਰਮੁਖ ਸਉ ਕਰਿ ਦੋਸਤੀ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਸਉ ਲਾਇ ਚਿਤੁ ॥
ਜੰਮਣ ਮਰਣ ਕਾ ਮੂਲੁ ਕਟੀਐ ਤਾਂ ਸੁਖੁ ਹੋਵੀ ਮਿਤ ॥
(ਸਲੋਕ ਵਾਰਾਂ ਤੇ ਵਧੀਕ ਮ: 3-66, ਸਫਾ 1421)

(Make friendship only with godly men and let your mind be attuned to the true Guru. Thus my friend, shall you snap the cycle of incarnations and attain eternal bliss).

The friendships of worldly-wise people are motivated by self interest and material gain. Whenever the interests clash, cracks appear in the edifice of friendship. As Guru Arjun said :

ਮਨਮੁਖਾ ਕੇਰੀ ਦੋਸਤੀ ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾ ਸਨਬੰਧੁ ॥
ਵੇਖਦਿਆ ਹੀ ਭਜਿ ਜਾਨਿ ਕਦੇ ਨ ਪਾਇਨਿ ਬੰਧੁ ॥
(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਵਾਰ ਮ: 5-5, ਸਫਾ 959)

(Friendship with selfish worldly people is a materialistic relationship. Such friends take to their heels in times of adversity).

Guru Nanak's friendship with Mardana was not a materialistic relationship. On the other hand they were attuned to each other in voice, mind and spirit. They belonged to a different world, the world of symphony. The only difference between the two was that Guru Nanak always transcended the symphony into the ethereal zones of divine melody, merging his identity with supernal cosmic consciousness.

ਅਨਹਤ ਸੁੰਨਿ ਰਤੇ ਸੇ ਕੈਸੇ ॥
ਜਿਸਤੇ ਉਪਜੇ ਤਿਸਹੀ ਜੈਸੇ ॥
(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: 1, ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸਟਿ-52, ਸਫਾ 943)

(Those who remain soaked in the ethereal notes of the divine melody become one with the creator).

Only a very delicate sensibility can appreciate the soundless melody. As Keats said :

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter."

Mardana had felt terror-stricken at the hideous appearance of Kalyug. He forgot that he had in his possession *Kirtcn* the most effective antidote to Kalyug's terror. Guru Nanak's mission in life was to place this antidote within the reach of the unhappy populace. Guru Nanak's friendship with Mardana was symbolic of the union of the holy word and human consciousness. Guru Nanak represented the holy word and Mardana the human consciousness. When the human consciousness lapsed into forgetfulness Kalyug made his appearance. Terrified by the spectre of Kalyug the human consciousness made hue and cry and this clamour caused the divine melody to snap. That is why Guru Nanak bade Mardana to banish terror from his mind :

ਡਰੀਐ ਜੇ ਡਰੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਹੋਰੁ ॥
ਡਰਿ ਡਰਿ ਡਰਣਾ ਮਨ ਕਾ ਸੋਰੁ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਮ: 1–2, ਸਫਾ 151)

Out of fear is born noise and noise adds more to fear. A frightened man starts screaming and his screams increase his fright instead of diminishing it. Thus he is caught in a vicious circle. This circle can be broken only by casting out fear from the mind. In order to be able to do so he must discard the disharmony produced by his screams and resort to the harmony of music. Thus through harmony (Kirtan) Kalyug and its terrors are vanquished. Kirtan is the lyrical fusion of the holy word and human consciousness.

ਨਾਨਕ ਦਾਸੁ ਹਰਿ ਕੀਰਤਨਿ ਰਾਤਾ
ਸਬਦੁ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਸਚੁ ਸਾਖੀ ॥
(ਸਾਰੰਗ ਮ: 5–122, ਸਫਾ 1227)

Kirtan is an art which touches the inner chords and evokes the latent divine harmony in the human soul. It is with the birth of this harmony that the ultimate reality is revealed. In the words of the famous German philosopher, Schelling :

"Art, religion and revelation are one and the same thing, superior even to philosophy. Philosohphy conceives God. Art is God."

The gods were taken aback when Lord Krishna asked for a boon of lifelong friendship with Arjuna. For the gods did not know what a blessing friendship was. Perhaps the very concept was alien to them. Gods have always been at loggerheads with one another. All their lives have been spent in deception, conspiracy and betrayal. The Puranas are full of the internecine quarrels and warfare among Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma and Agni. It is recorded that once Shiva decapitated the fifth head of Brahma. It was, therefore, difficult for the gods to appreciate friendship. Only Lord Krishna knew its value. Lord Krishna's friendship with his childhood playmate Sudama is a byword. Lord Krishna treated Sudama with greater love and regard than he had shown to any one of his devotees. The sentiment of friendship was something incomprehensible to gods. No wonder, therefore, that they were startled at Lord Krishna's request. They were startled once again when Guru Gobind Singh asked for the boon of death in the battlefield.

ਹੇ ਰਵਿ ਹੇ ਸਸਿ ਹੇ ਕਰੁਣਾ ਨਿਧਿ ਮੇਰੀ ਅਬੈ ਬਿਨਤੀ ਸੁਨ ਲੀਜੈ ।
ਔਰ ਨ ਮਾਂਗਤ ਹਉ ਤੁਮ ਤੇ ਕਛੁ ਚਾਹਤ ਹੌਂ ਚਿਤ ਮੈ ਸੋਈ ਕੀਜੈ ।
ਸ਼ਸਤ੍ਰਨ ਸੋਂ ਅਤਿ ਹੀ ਰਣ ਭੀਤਰ ਜੂਝ ਮਰੋਂ ਤਉ ਸਾਚ ਪਤੀਜੈ ।
ਸੰਤ ਸਹਾਇ ਸਦਾ ਜਗ ਮਾਇ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਕਰ ਸਯਾਮ ਇਹੈ ਬਰ ਦੀਜੈ ।
(ਪ: 10, ਕ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਨ ਅਵਤਾਰ 1899)

(O Gracious gods, listen to this prayer of mine. I seek nothing of Thee except the fulfilment of this desire of my heart, that I should die fighting in the battlefield. O Thou helper of saints in this world, be merciful and grant me this boon.)

Rav and Sas were gods. Guru Gobind Singh beseeched them to grant only one boon, namely death in the battle field. This strange request must have astonished them for the gods were mortally afraid of death. They went to the extent of churning the ocean to find an antidote to death. The ocean did yield to them this antidote and they called it nectar. This nectar provided another bone of contention for the gods and there was a stampede to grab it.

Guru Gobind Singh did not churn the ocean but he had vanquished death and transformed it into something to be longed for.

The gods must have granted Lord Krishna the boon that he asked for, as his friendship with Arjuna indeed proved to be lifelong. When Lord Krishna departed from this mortal world Arjuna was deeply bereaved. The Mahabharta describes his anguish in the following words :

ਭਗਵਾਨ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਕ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਨ ਨੂੰ ਨਾ ਦੇਖ ਕਰ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਬੜਾ ਦੁਖ ਹੋ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ, ਸਿਰ ਚਕਰਾ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ, ਚਿਤ ਅਤਯੰਤ ਉਦਵਿਗਨ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ । ਇਕ ਖਿਨ ਵੀ ਸ਼ਾਂਤੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਮਿਲਦੀ । ਜਨਾਰਦਨ ਦੇ ਬਿਨਾ ਹੁਣ ਮੈਂ ਜੀਉਂਦਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਰਹਿ ਸਕਦਾ ।
(ਮਹਾਂਭਾਰਤ ਮੌ: 81, 22-23)

(After Lord Krishna's death I suffer the pangs of separation. My head is in a whirl and my mind is greatly upset. I have not known a single moment of peace ! I cannot live in this world without Janardan.)

Arjuna might have ended his own life had he not been comforted by the following words of Rishi Vyasa.

"ਏਸ ਪ੍ਰਿਥਵੀ ਦਾ ਭਾਰ ਉਤਾਰਨ ਦੇ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਹੀ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੇ ਜਨਮ ਲੀਤਾ ਸੀ,
ਉਹ ਕੰਮ ਪੂਰਾ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ, ਉਸਦੇ ਹੋਣ ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਉਹ ਆਪਣੇ ਅਸਥਾਨ ਨੂੰ ਚਲੇ ਗਏ ।
(ਮਹਾਂਭਾਰਤ, ਮੌ: 81, 29-30)

(Lord Krishna had taken birth in the mortal world to rid the world of evil. That divine mission having been completed he has left for his heavenly abode.)

However, this exhortation did not have a lasting effect on Arjuna's mind. Nothing could heal his sorrow. Nothing could reconcile him to Krishna's death. Before long, he alongwith his brothers and spouse Dhrupadi left the kingdom and went to the Himalayas where they soon perished in the heavy snows.

Pandava's had, through conquest, consolidated India and given it the semblance of one country. Yudhishtra performed the 'Ashvamedh Yag' and the 'Rajsu Yag' and thus established his suzerainty over the farflung principalities. The untimely end of the Pandavas once again destroyed India's unity and led to its fragmentation. Already the long drawn battle of Mahabharta had dealt a staggering blow to the country. The flower of youth and heroism had been cut and lakhs of warriors lay dead in the battlefield. This was followed by the great loss caused by Krishna's accidental death at the hands of a hunter. Then came the self-imposed exile of the Pandavas and Dhrupadi and their last suicidal journey to the Himalayan snows. The blind king Dhritrashtar and his queen were left alone in the wilderness around them. In search of peace they renounced the world and alongwith Kunti they moved to the jungle where they died in a forest fire.

Mardana was the personification of the art through which humanity can conquer Kalyug. He was the first devotee whose soul the great Guru filled with divine melody. Mardana was a devotee, disciple, a rebeck player, a musician; but first and foremost he was proud to be his guru's friend and comrade. Guru Nanak also responded to Mardana's friendship with equal warmth and intimacy. The two hearts were beating in unison :

ਜੋ ਦਿਲਿ ਮਿਲਿਆ ਸੁ ਮਿਲਿ ਰਹਿਆ
ਮਿਲਿਆ ਕਹੀਐ ਰੇ ਸੋਈ ॥ (ਤਿਲੰਗ ਮ: 1, ਅਸ਼ਟ 1, ਸਫ਼ਾ 725)

(A perfect union is one where the hearts beat in unison.)

Why did Guru Nanak choose a low-caste musician to be his life-long companion. To quote from the Bible :

"......but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put to shame them that are wise, and God chose the weak things of the world so that he might put to shame the things that are strong. (Corinthians 26–27)

Guru Nanak always identified himself with the lowly and the outcasts, befriending them and bringing them comfort. Thus through the medium of a low-caste musician Guru Nanak conquered Kalyug and its evils. Till Mardana's last breath Guru Nanak remained in his company. Chroniclers differ as to the place of Mardana's death. According to some sources his end came on the banks of river Kurram in Afghanistan. Others do not agree with this view.

In the words of Macauliffe :

"The Guru said to Mardana, 'it is customary to dispose of the dead body of a Brahmin by immersing it in the river, that of a Khtari is consigned to flames; the dead body of a Vaisha is thrown to winds and that of a Sudra is buried. How would you like your dead body to be disposed of ?' To which Mardana replied, 'The different modes of disposing the dead body are no more than symbols of caste ego. My ego has already been vanquished by your teachings. I am concerned only about my soul. As regards the body you can do with it whatever you like' Then the Guru asked, 'Would you like a tomb to be raised, so that you become famous in the world ?' Mardana replied, 'After my soul gets liberated from the tomb of my body do not imprison it again in a tomb made of stone.' Upon which the Guru said, 'You have truly realised Brahm; therefore you are, in reality, a Brahmin. Your dead body will be immersed in the river Ravi."

There is also some controversy about the date of Mardana's death. Most sources are agreed that it occurred some time in the year 1534 A.D. Thus it appears that Mardana died only five years before Guru Nanak. It is difficult to say how Guru Nanak reacted to the demise of his life long comrade. It is difficult to have an idea about his emotion and poignancy. To understand this one must have a prophet's sensibility. Looking at the lifeless body of Mardana and the mute rabab he must have uttered these words :—

ਤੂਟੀ ਤੰਤੁ ਰਬਾਬ ਕੀ ਵਾਜੈ ਨਹੀ ਵਿਜੋਗਿ ॥
(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: 1, ਦਖਣੀ ਓਅੰਕਾਰੁ-32, ਸਫਾ 934)

(After death the body is like the broken chord of the rebeck, music no longer flows out of it.)

Then in order to console his grief stricken mind he must have said :

ਜੋ ਉਸਾਰੇ ਸੋ ਢਾਹਸੀ ਤਿਸੁ ਬਿਨੁ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥
ਗੁਰ ਪਰਸਾਦੀ ਤਿਸੁ ਸੰਮਲਾ ਤਾ ਤਨਿ ਦੂਖੁ ਨ ਹੋਇ ।
(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ, ਦਖਣੀ ਓਅੰ: ਮ: 1-31, ਸਫਾ 934)

(He who creates the human body shall also destroy it. Besides Him there is no creator or destroyer. If by the grace of the Guru I take refuge in the Almighty, my body shall suffer no pain.)

Was Mardana a rebeck player ? More likely, he was the rebeck itself. His body was the string of the rabab. His death was the snapping of that string. His soul was as high-strung and sensitive as the string of his instrument. Therefore his music had the power to change Kalyug into Satyug. His rabab had the fourth key that Farabi's instrument lacked. This master key attuned his rabab to the heavenly music of the cosmos, or may be it was the divine cosmic song itself that touched the chords of his rebeck :

ਰਬਾਬੁ ਪਖਾਵਜ ਤਾਲ ਘੁੰਘਰੂ
ਅਨਹਦ ਸਬਦੁ ਵਜਾਵੈ ॥
(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 5-43, ਸਫਾ 381)

REFERENCES

1. One absorbed in meditation on God. Kabir also expressed the same sentiment in the following sloka :

   ਕਬੀਰ ਪਾਪੀ ਭਗਤਿ ਨ ਭਾਵਈ ਹਰਿ ਪੂਜਾ ਨ ਸੁਹਾਇ ॥
   ਮਾਖੀ ਚੰਦਨ ਪਰਹਰੈ ਜਹ ਬਿਗੰਧ ਤਹਿ ਜਾਏ ॥ 68 ॥

   (Sayeth Kabir, the sinners have no love for
   the devotee of God nor can they see any merit
   in worship, just as a fly disdains the fragrant
   sandalwood and moves to malodorous things.)

2. ਬਿਆਸ ਬਿਚਾਰਿ ਕਹਿਓ ਪਰਮਾਰਥੁ ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮ ਸਰਿ ਨਾਹੀ ॥

   (ਸੋਰਠ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ-4, ਪੰਨਾ 658)

PEARL OF PEERLESS LUSTRE

[ਆਬਦਾਰ ਮੋਤੀ]

In the village of Machhiwara, in District Ludhiana, there lived Gulaba Masand and his younger brother Panjaba. An afternoon in the year 1704 A.D., found the two brothers sad and crestfallen. They had just returned from the cremation ground after performing the last rites of Nihal Chand Khatri's old mother, Gurdei.

"No one thought the old woman would die so soon", said Panjaba in a voice choked with emotion. "Only the other day she was sitting in our courtyard. She could not climb up the stairs, so wasted and weak was she, but who could say—."

"She would certainly have climbed the stairs," interrupted Gulaba, "but the gracious Guru came down himself. He seemed to have descended all the steps in a single stride. Convulsively, the old woman prostrated before the Guru and placed her head at the sacred feet. With his dreamy eyes, the Guru bestowed his blessings on the prostrate figure.

'Mother' said he softly, 'bring the robe you have woven for me. It is that which has beckoned me hither.' The old woman seemed reluctant to lift her head. The touch of the lotus feet had brought to her indescribable joy. She was drinking deep from a blissful fount.

'Mother ?' the Guru's gentle voice roused her, 'I am waiting for your offering. Pray bring it.'

The old woman raised her head, as though suddenly awakened from a gossamer dream. The cup of divine nectar had been removed beyond her reach. Through tearful eyes she looked at the Guru's luminous face. Fumbling about with her semi-closed eyes, she picked up the robe from the cot and placed it at the Guru's feet. Then she knelt down on the folded robe. Once again her soul seemed immersed in fathomless peace."

Panjaba : "It seemed to me she had gone to sleep."

Gulaba : "But I was worried. News had reached me that a large detachment of the Moghul army, nearly five thousand strong, was approaching in search of the Guru."

Panjaba : "Yet, when the Guru heard these disconcerting tidings he was quite unperturbed."

Gulaba : "True, but I was more worried about my own security. Were any informer to get wind of Guru's presence, we would have fallen prey to the Mughal wrath."

Panjaba : "That would have been dreadful. Thank God you could persuade the Guru to leave in time. You must have broached the subject very tactfully. Had I been there I would have been completely at a loss for words."

Gulaba : "All I said was, 'Sire, the Mughal force is approaching fast, in search of you. I am greatly worried, if any one were to reveal your presence and you are captured, it will also mean no end of trouble for me. It is not good to tarry here any longer. Malwa would be a much safer place.'

The Guru wanted to banish my disquietude. 'Do not fear', said he with calm assurance, 'I am under the protection of the Almighty Lord. I act in total submission to His will. No temporal authority can capture those who live in His protection.'

This reply unnerved me. I folded my hands in supplication and said. 'Sire, you are omnipotent, calm and unruffled like the ocean. But we are like a little pond whose waters are disturbed by the slightest movement. It is difficult for us to remain composed in the face of such danger.

The Guru noticed my trepidation and laughed. 'Very well', He said 'I shall do what you desire. But first go and fetch Gurdei, the mother of Nihal Chand Khatri.

She is very old and has been pining to meet me. She has been spinning and weaving a robe for me. Ask her to bring it along'."

Panjaba : "One thing I cannot understand. I hear that Ghani Khan was keen to take the Guru to his own house. Why then did you insist on bringing him here ?"

Gulaba : "You know that the Guru arrived here after giving battle to the Moghul forces who had laid seige to the mud fortress of Chamkaur. At the insistence of his disciples, the Guru had to leave the fortress, under cover of the night. He also permitted Sangat Singh, who bore a striking resemblance to the Guru, to dress up like himself and take his position at the ramparts of the fortress. You also know that the garrison, whose strength was only forty, fought to the last man. Well, I insisted on bringing the Guru to our house because like others I also thought that Sangat Singh's death would mislead the besieging army and they would not pursue the Guru. But, fate had willed otherwise. When the decapitated head of Sangat Singh was brought before the Subedar of Sirhind, he flew into a rage :

'This is not the Guru,' he thundered, 'you have been befooled. The Guru must have escaped. Go and search for him everywhere. Bring him dead or in chains.' How could I anticipate this development."

Panjaba : "For years the old woman had been pining for Guru's darshan. Perhaps it was that which made him agree to come to our house."

Gulaba : "He lovingly caressed the coarse robe and sent it to the dyer. He wanted it dyed blue, the colour of deep ocean. Then in sweet serenity, he sat down leisurely beside the old woman. A beatific smile played about his lips. Tenderly he took both her hands into his left hand and with his right hand he lifted her face. A blaze of illumination came over the old woman's countenance. Her face became unwrinkled and youthful. Her flushed cheeks gathered the bloom of roses on them. Her withered lips were tinged by the colour of youth. Her coarse hands lookd like henna dyed soft and slender hands of a young damsel. Her eyes sparkled like those of a bashful bride and her whole being seemed to exude the fragrance of blossoms. To witness this transformation in the ravaged old creature was a unique experience for me."

Punjaba : "She was blessed before her death. For long, it had been her burning desire to behold the Guru. Who knows during how many incarnations she had languished for the divine darshan."

Gulaba : "To me it seemed that for ages she had been lying in a deep slumber. The tender affectionate glance of the Guru awakened her to the life eternal. It was at that moment that I realized how I had wasted my life singing hymns mechanically and without much devotion and collecting the offerings from the Guru's disciples. Lured by the love of money, we forgot our love for the Guru. That is why spiritual perception has eluded us. And here was this simple old woman whose unsullied love and devotion had won her deliverance from the cycle of incarnations. For the first time I understood what Bhai Gurdas meant when he wrote :

ਤੈਸੇ ਪ੍ਰਿਆ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਰਸ ਰਸਿਕ ਰਸਾਲ ਸੰਤ,
ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਘਟਤ ਨ ਪ੍ਰਬਲ ਅੰਗ ਅੰਗ ਕੀ ।[1]

(The fish spends all its life in water but its love for water does not diminish. The moth burns itself to death in its deathless passion for the flame. The bee never feels surfeit with the fragrance of the rose, nor the bird with the expanse of the blue sky. The peacock's love for the black clouds is never on the wane. In the same manner the love for God in which the hearts of true seekers are drenched never suffers a setback. On the other hand it grows stronger and stronger till it permeates their whole being).

(2)

There was a knock at the door.

"It must be your sister-in-law," said Gulaba to his younger brother, "Go and open the latch."

Gulaba's wife came in. She was pale and dazed and trembled like a frightened fawn. With a mute gesture she beckoned her husband to come near. Then she almost collapsed on the cot.

"What is the matter with you ?" asked Gulaba in a tremulous voice, "What has happened ?"

She tried to speak but could hardly utter a word. Gulaba knew that she had been to Nihal Chand's house. Nihal Chand's wife was a great friend of hers. Since it is customary not to cook any food in the household on the day a death occurs, she had gone to tell Nihal Chand's wife that she would be sending dinner for all of them. What could have happened that had frightened her out of her wits ? Panjaba got up quickly, brought some melted ghee in a cup and began to massage the palms of her hands and feet. On the other side of the cot, sat Gulaba nervously feeling her pulse.

The massage revived her a bit. By putting her hand to her mouth she made them understand that she wanted a sip of water. Having moistened her vocal chords, speaking in a scarcely audible whisper, she said, "There is a havildar outside our house."

Having said these words with a supreme effort she sank heavily against the pillow, completely exhausted. These words created a commotion in Gulaba's heart and made his head reel. His face deathly pale, he sat down on the floor and began to bemoan his fate. Yes, this thing had to happen. How long could they put off the evil day. How long could they hide the fact from the world that the Guru had stayed with them. When the moon rises up high in the heavens, it is there for every body to see. Surely, some one had gone and informed the Moghul authorities. Perhaps the dyer, or someone else who bore him ill will and had been waiting to settle score.

"We are undone," said Panjaba, "What shall we do now ?"

"It is undoubtedly the doomsday for us," replied Gulaba, "but bolt all the doors and put out the light. Let us lie down in our beds and pull the quilts over our heads. By doing so we may survive till the morning."

This is exactly what Gulaba and his wife did. Panjaba, on the other hand, went upstairs to the first floor room which the Guru had occupied. Peeping through a chink in the door he could make out a human figure standing in the street below. The man had his gaze fixed steadfastly on the ground and with the air of a detective looking for footprints, was now moving to the back of the house. Panjaba at once came downstairs and unlocked the front door. He then hurriedly locked it from outside. After exploring the back street, the stranger was now making for the front door. Panjaba observed him closely, especially his waist-band and the tuft in his turban. Then he came forward and boldly addressed the stranger :

"Havildar Sahib, is that you ? I am seeing you after a long time. You have indeed grown very weak. Have you been ill or what ? Last time we met, you were in perfect health. Where did we meet last and when ? Can you recollect ? Let me see if I can."

The man made no reply. His eyes were still glued to the ground.

"I know what you are looking for," said Panjaba cleverly, "but you are looking in the wrong place. No one had stayed with us. My brother and his wife have been out of the village for a fortnight. I have also returned after months. See, our house is locked. The key is with my brother. I shall have to spend the night with the neighbours. In the morning I will get the blacksmith to break open the lock. If you really want to find the clue let me guide you to the right place".

Saying this Panjaba led the listless Havildar to another part of the village. He pointed out a distant house to him and left him there.

He did not have to unlock the front door of his house. There was a berry tree in the street which he climbed and from one of the overhanging branches jumped into his courtyard. Hurriedly he made for his brother's bedroom.

"Say 'well done' to your brother, for I have sorted out things nicely".

When Panjaba jumped in the courtyard with a thud, the sound had the effect of an earthquake on Gulaba. His heart was pounding with fright. Seeing that it was none else than his brother, he tried to compose himself. In low whispers Panjaba narrated to his brother all that he had done.

Gulaba had love, admiration and respect for the Guru but at the same time he was afraid for his own life. Like a shrewd householder he wanted to follow the middle path between his loyalty to the Guru and solicitude for self. He lacked the courage to face the consequences of a total commitment to the Guru which were too dreadful to contemplate, In those days it was extremely difficult for a Hindu to lead a peaceful, contented and fear-free life. To lean completely on one side was even more difficult. Even the attempt to follow the middle course imposed a heavy strain. Gulaba was still young, yet streaks of grey hair had appeared in his beard. His efforts to be loyal to the Guru, and also to maintain cordial relations with the Mughals were making him prematurely old. The younger brother Panjaba was cast in a different mould. Despite his age, he was a little immature, quick and impulsive and did not take life seriously, All he longed for in life, was a pat on his back. He was ready to lay down his life for any one who gave him this pat and lauded his cleverness. He was prepared to sacrifice everything, if the Guru gave him the pat. But if instead the local ruler praised him, he also felt greatly elated. His sister-in-law knew his weakness for praise and kept him fed on honeyed words.

Gulaba's wife was worldly wise. Her paramount interests were her domestic or temporal affairs. In her social circles she had a great reputation for worldly wisdom, a fluent tongue and convincing manner. She always spoke in an affected manner which the listeners enjoyed. While talking her face radiated joy and self assurance. Though she was not much inclined towards spiritual matters, she knew well enough, that as a

Masand, Guru's representative, her husband had to support the cause of the Guru.

But today lying in her room, she was greatly troubled. She who was ever ready to advise others, found herself completely at a loss, and lay in bed like deadwood with hardly any movement.

The door opened. It was her husband and her brother-in-law. In a voice full of good cheer Gulaba said "Fear no more. Your dear brother-in-law has worked wonders" Hearing this she sat up. Colour seemed to be returning to her cheeks. She coughed a little to clear her throat, then lovingly patting Panjaba's back, she said, "Oh my darling son, you are wonderful, I knew you could untie the toughest knots. I have always said it and I say it again. Without your presence of mind and resourcefulness we would have been nowhere. Your brother is totally lacking in worldly wisdom. Tell me, my son, how have you been able to avert the crisis ?"

What more did Panjaba want ? All this adulation was enough to feed his ego. In a burst of eloquence he narrated to his sister-in-law how he had put the Havildar on a false scent.

Her senses restored, Gulaba's wife recollected that she had to send food for Nihal Chand's family. Though reassured, she was still afraid to stir out. Gulaba also did not show the least inclination to move out. Again it fell to Panjaba's lot to accomplish this difficult task. It was too late to cook any dinner. Panjaba thought of the large quantity of sacramental pudding (Karah Prasad) which the devotees had brought to the Masand's house as an offering to the Guru. It could very well serve the purpose of dinner for both households. He half filled a small brass bucket with the Prasad and climbed up the berry tree with the agility of a squirrel. Before jumping into the street he made sure that it was deserted. He had gone only a few steps when he saw the Havildar resting against the wall of a house. As usual Panjaba kept his wits about him. Offering a handful of the sacramental food to the Havildar he said—

"You must be hungry, Havildar sahib, here is some nice pudding, though cold. I brought it from the neighbour's house, My own house is locked. Otherwise I would have brought a hot plateful for you." The Havildar stretched out his left hand. Punjaba did not like it. It was sacrilege not to receive the sacred food in both hands cupped together. But he was happy that the Havildar had not declined the Prasad. The Havildar put his left hand to his mouth and ate the pudding, without moving his right hand. This was a mystery which Panjaba did not feel inclined to unravel on the spot.

(3)

The Havildar's mind was a little dazed. The rich food not only provided him some sustenance but also restored his thinking faculty. He recollected the strange sight he had seen through the chinks of a door. A young girl in her early teens was tenderly holding a scroll which she kissed again and again. Repeatedly, she asked her father to read it out to her. Reverently, the father complied with each request. After many such readings, the girl would take back the scroll and kiss it. Again she held it out saying—"Just once more, Abba Jaan. I want to hear it again." This went on for quite some time. Neither did the father tire of reading again and again nor th daughter of listening to it. There was not enough oil in the lamp. Soon it flickered and went out. Now there was pitch darkness in the room but it did not deter the girl from repeating her request. Despite the darkness, the father read out the writing once again. How could any one read in the dark, the havildar had wondered. Then he heard the sound of a loud kiss. Obviously the girl had again put the scroll to her lips.

"Abba Jaan, what will you do with this paper ?"

"Child", replied the father, "This is my most precious possession. This is the Hukamnama of Guru Gobind Singh. Blessed are those to whom the gracious Guru issues his Hukamnamas. I know its writing by heart. Even death cannot snatch the writing from me for it is now dissolved in my very soul. This is my passport to heaven. Even in this world it has elevated me to a supreme status. I am no longer Ghani Khan, a mere mortal. The benign Guru has promoted me to join the ranks of the immortals.

"How was that," asked the daughter, "Tell me Abba Jaan, how did it all happen ?"

"The Guru dressed himself in a blue robe that Gurdei had offered. As your uncle Nabi Khan and I made to lift the cot on which the Guru reclined, do you know what he said ? He said :

''ਆਦਿ ਅਨੀਲੁ ਅਨਾਦਿ ਅਨਾਹਤਿ ਜੁਗੁ ਜੁਗੁ ਏਕੋ ਵੇਸੁ ॥''

ਜਪੁਜੀ ਪੰਨਾ 6

(He is the source of everything, pure, without beginning, indestructible and immutable through the aeons.)

Outside the village a search party of Moghul soldiers accosted us. We presented the Guru as Uch da Pir (the most exalted Pir), who was observing his weekly day of silence. Thus we escaped further scrutiny and carried the Guru from Machhiwara to Heyhar village. Though we could feel the weight of his body we did not see him most of the time. As and when he uttered the words

'ਆਦਿ ਅਨੀਲੁ ਅਨਾਦਿ ਅਨਾਹਤਿ'

he seemed to have become one with the limitless blue heavens. All along our way to Heyhar we moved through thick darkness, yet surprisingly, we could see our way clearly. There was no moon in the sky nor was there any flash of lightning to guide us. Our path was mysteriously lit by the dazzling radiance of his heavenly blue robe. At Heyhar a devotee offered him a blue steed for a mount, on which he rode from Heyhar to Deena."

"Tell me Abba Jaan," said the girl, "How did it feel to lift the Guru's cot on your heads ?"

"As soon as the cot touched my head I saw a strange vision. It seemed as though I carried the vast starry firmament on my head, the blue heavens and all that there is in them—the stars and the planets that guide human destiny and reduce great empires to dust. My whole being was flooded with light and I became a part of the infinite vault that I saw over my head".

"And what did the Guru say to you when you took leave of him ?"

He said, "Ghani Khan, Nabi Khan, you have risked your all for me. What reward shall I give you for your services ?"

"And what was your reply."

"We folded our hands. I said, 'All that we possess has been bestowed upon us by you, but if you must reward us give us thy love, so that we may ever be ready to die for thee. O Lord of the blue heavens, bless us so that we may spend the rest of our lives in your service and attain martyrdom in dying for your sacred cause.' The Guru closed his eyes. When he opened them they sparkled with tears. His divine countenance was suffused with a rosy radiance. In a tremulous voice I spoke again, 'O Lord of the seven heavens, Master of the two worlds, O Sultan of the universe, Emperor of the stellar systems, what is it that is happening to us ? Our heads are whirling. We feel entranced in unspeakable rapture. A blissful wave has engulfed us. Our souls seem to have lost their physical bondage and are streaming out like a fluid light from our every pore. What is it that you have done to us ?

'Let me tell you', said the divine Guru, 'What I have done. I have made you my own sons'. Then he bestowed this hukamnama upon us. With his own pen, with his own gracious hand he wrote in it. "Ghani Khan and Nabi Khan are dearer to me than my own sons."

Again the sound of a loud kiss was heard. It seemed to the Havildar as though the girl was now holding her father in a tight embrace and was saying something in a voice choked with emotion. He listened attentively.

"In that case, Abba Jaan", said the girls, "I am the Guru's grand daughter. Isn't it so ?"

"Yes dear, you undoubtedly are".

"Tell me Abba Jaan, how many grand daughters the Guru has ?"

"None else," said the father, "You are the only grand daughter of Guru Gobind Singh. Do you know child, the Guru's sons are of two kinds ?"

"Two kinds !" said the girl in surprise. How is that Abba Jaan ?"

"You know that I had sent your uncle Nabi Khan to Deena to bring tidings of the Guru. Your uncle returned yesterday. He narrated to me how the Guru reacted to the news of the death of his younger two sons who were bricked alive at the behest of the Subedar of Sirhind. When told of the grim tragedy, the Guru drew two small lines on the sand; then effaced them. 'I do not grieve over the death of my sons,' said he, 'any more than I grieve over the effacement of these two lines'.

This is how he referred to his sons who were the flesh of his flesh and who were born of his loins. They were to him like lines drawn on the sand. But to us he has given a different status. We belong to the other kind. Not on sand with his fingers, but in indelible ink with his pen he has written that Ghani Khan and Nabi Khan are dearer to him than his own sons".

The havildar then recollected how after this the girl had burst into song :

"I am His grand daughter
His grand daughter am I
The only one that He has
The Lord of the blue heavens
None else to share this honour with me
A peerless pearl am I
Of His lustrous eyes am I born
Two oceans of Divine effulgence
Those eyes
With their luminous glance
They pierce the pearl of my heart
And make me His own !"

Then she spoke again to her father :

"Abba Jaan, you lifted the blue firmament of the Guru's cot. I yearn to kiss the hooves of his blue steed. His disciples kissed his sacred feet blistered blue by walking barefoot in the

Machhiwara jungle. You kissed the wooden legs of his blue cot. The longing of my heart is to be crushed under the hooves of his blue steed. Take me there, Abba Jaan. Let me lie down over the track which his blue steed is to tread".

The dialogue between the daughter and father continued.

The havildar kept on listening to these whispers for a long time until sleep over-powered him.

Guru Gobind Singh's life story is a strange and eventful saga of heroism and sacrifice, but the last four years of his life were indeed crowded with events. His remarkable achievements and heroic deeds during these eventful years have always inspired awe in the minds of historians and philosophers. In the winter of the year 1761 (Bikrami Sammat) he had to leave Anandpur fort. Soon thereafter the battle of Chamkaur was fought which is unparalleled in the annals of the world for sheer heroism and spirit of sacrifice. In this battle the elder two sons of the Guru, Sahibzada Ajit Singh and Sahibzada Jujhar Singh died in the battlefield fighting against heavy odds. This was closely followed by the martyrdom of Sahibzada Zorawar Singh and Sahibzada Fateh Singh who were bricked alive in Sirhind by the Moghul Subedar. Covering long distances on foot, Guru Gobind Singh reached Machhiwara village and stayed for a few days with Gulaba Masand. From there he went to Deena and thereafter at Khidrana (now Mukatsar) he fought his last battle against Wazir Khan, the subedar of Sirhind. He spent a few months at Talwandi Sabo and then proceeded to Deccan. After baptizing Banda Bahadur at Nanded, he laid down his life for the country in the month of Kartik 1765 (Bikrami).

A few days after the Guru left Machhiwara the havildar arrived there. He looked pale and ill. His face was lean and emaciated, with sunken cheeks and high cheekbones. His eyes were narrow and watery and there was a certain nameless terror in them. Wherever the Guru went the havildar followed him but always remained at a distance. By the time Guru Gobind Singh reached Talwandi Sabo, the havildar's health completely broke down. For months he remained confined to bed. Soon after his recovery, he resumed his pursuit and reached Chhatiana village. By this time the Guru had crossed into Rajputana on his way to Deccan. Chhatiana is about twelve miles east of Mukatsar and is known in Sikh history for three remarkable events. It was here that the Bairar soldiers insisted that their overdue salaries be paid by the Guru. Just then some rich devotees brought offerings of money for the Guru. The Bairars were paid off. The Guru desired that the remaining money be buried at a secret place. That is how Chhatiana came to be known in Sikh history as 'Guptsar'. Thirdly, Chhatiana is associated with the famous Syed fakir Behmi who lived on a low hillock near the village. When he met the Guru he embraced Sikhism and became one of the Guru's closest associates. The most distinguished and learned disciple of Pir Behmi was known as 'Murid Ji'. He was a man of great intelligence and keen intellect. It was he who, after the death of Behmi fakir, looked after the monastery on the hillock and carried on the ascetic tradition. At Chhatiana the havildar met the Murid. The two had been great friends in their boyhood. Meeting after long years they were soon engaged in a friendly conversation. Murid narrated to the havildar how Behmi fakir had come under the spell of the Guru's magnetic personality and how he joined the Sikh fold.

Havildar : Why did the Pir change his name ?

Murid : Were you to know his new name you would readily understand why he adopted it.

Havildar : What is his new name ?

Murid : Ajmer Singh.

Havildar : What is so wonderful about the name. I still do not understand why he adopted it.

Murid : You know that Ajmer is famous for the Durgah (Shrine) of the great mystic saint Khwaja Mueeundin Chishti. A pilgrimage to the Durgah, though very rewarding, is no longer free from risk.

Havildar : Risk ? What risk ?

Murid : The pilgrims are likely to incur the wrath of the Emperor Aurangzeb.

Havildar : Why so ? It is the tomb of a muslim fakir. Why should the pilgrimage annoy the Emperor ?

Murid : I will tell you why. For centuries the Durgah has had a great following, not only amongst the common people but also among princes and kings. The Durgah has also been instrumental in settling disputes between claimants to the throne, thereby preventing internecine warfare.

Havildar : How did the Durgah arbitrate in these matters ?

Murid : It was like this. Both the parties to the dispute used to leave their bows alongwith two arrows in the sanctum of the Durgah. All the doors of the Durgah were locked up for the night. In the morning the doors were opened in the presence of both claimants. Invariably one of the bows had the arrow fixed on the string while the other arrow lay alongside the other bow in the position it was originally placed. The prince whose arrow moved on to the bow was declared and accepted as the true successor to the throne.

Havildar : Does the Emperor Aurangzeb dislike this mode of settling disputes ?

Murid : He would have certainly liked it, had the award been given in his favour. As it happened, it was Dara Shikoh's arrow that was found strung on the bow. Aurangzeb was furious. Then followed a bloody war of succession in which he came out victorious. Soon after he ascended the throne, he ordered that the whole matter be investigated. Thorough searches were made which revealed an underground tunnel connecting the sanctum of the Durgah to the head priest's residence.[2]

Havildar : I never knew that the priests of holy shrines could be so clever.

Murid : From that day Aurangzeb's mind has been prejudiced against Ajmer and all it contains. Do you understand now why the Guru gave the name of Ajmer Singh to the Pir ?[3]

Havildar : It was obviously meant as an affront to the authority of Aurangzeb.

Murid : Not only the Emperor's mind is full of malice for the Ajmer shrine, he has a deep-seated prejudice against all residents of Ajmer. One of the charges for which Sarmad was executed was that he was an Ajmeri.

Havildar : Sarmad was such a devout Muslim, a saintly soul.

Murid : No doubt. But the Emperor suspected all saintly persons to be in favour of Dara Shikoh's succession, and against him.

Havildar : Oh what a pity ! That means further persecution of holy men.

Murid : But the despair of the holy men has now been banished. They have found a leader.

Havildar : Guru Gobind Singh ?

Murid : Yes, Guru Gobind Singh.

Havildar : Has the Guru any magic to save the holy men ?

Murid : Yes he has. Whoever comes under his spell sheds all fear of death. He learns to regard death as the gateway to the land of eternal bliss. His disciples greet death exultingly. Take the case of our own Pir Sahib. He was such an easy going person. He could not bear even the slightest discomfort or pain. Now he is completely transformed.

Havildar : How could the Guru bring about this transformation ?

Murid : We ourselves are surprised about it but what the Pir himself has jotted down, reveals the secret to some extent. These jottings also expound the Guru's concept of love for God.

Havildar : Is there anything peculiar about this concept ?

Murid : There is. Just listen. This is what our Pir has written in his diary.

"God is not an empty nothingness, nor is He a firm or solid substance made of stone or metal. He is the supreme and immanent radiance, the flame of eternal consciousness.

ਜਾਗਤ ਜੋਤਿ ਜਪੈ ਨਿਸ ਬਾਸਰ

(Ever to meditate on the flame of eternal consciousness)

Who can love a flame ? Only he who can immolate himself in it. To meditate on God's name is like sacrificing oneself in the flame of eternal consciousness.

ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੇਰੇ ਨਾਮ ਵਿਟਹੁ ਬਿੰਦ ਬਿੰਦ ਚੁਖ ਚੁਖ ਹੋਇ ॥
(ਧਨਾ: ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 660)

(May I be a sacrifice to Thy name, O Lord, May I be torn into bits for Thy sake).

It is only the moth that can love the flame and be consumed by it. Providence has provided him with wings so that he may fly into the flame and immolate himself in a blaze of light. It does not flinch from the burning heat. It makes no effort to escape. Willingly and consciously it enters the funeral pyre without fear of pain and death.

ਡਿਗਿ ਨ ਡੋਲੈ ਕਤਹੂ ਨ ਧਾਵੈ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ਕੋ ਇਹੁ ਮਹਲੁ ਪਾਵੈ ॥
(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 889)

(It is only by the grace of the Guru that the seeker attains the stage of firm and unflinching belief).

Thus like the moth, does he become transmuted into a supernal splendour.

ਬਲਿ ਜਾਇ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਸੁਖ ਦਾਤੇ ਪਰਗਾਸੁ ਮਨਿ ਤਨਿ ਹੋਇ ਜੀਉ ॥
(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 926)

(Sayeth Nanak, those who burn themselves for the giver of bliss, acquire an enlightened mind and an effulgent body)

Telling beads is a mechanical process. In the worship of idols the mind may keep on wandering.

ਆਗੈ ਰਾਖਿਓ ਸਾਲਗਿਰਾਮੁ ॥ ਮਨੁ ਕੀਨੋ ਦਹਦਿਸ ਬਿਸ੍ਰਾਮੁ ॥
(ਰਾਮ: ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 888)

(Efforts to concentrate on the idol are frustrated by the restless mind roving in all directions)

Such liberty is not available to the devotee of Eternal Consciousness. His mind does not wander. 'Simrin', the endless repetition of God's name, is like the flutter of the moth, an effort to fly to the flame in which lies the "samadhi", the state of silent super-consciousness. About the rememberance of the Lord as a burning flame, a lighted lamp, the Guru says :

"ਦੀਵਾ ਮੇਰਾ ਏਕੁ ਨਾਮੁ"
(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 358)

But this lamp remains lighted only if it is filled up with oil. The oil is available to those only who search for it. This oil is not obtainable from oilseeds. It springs up from within one- self, provided one is not afraid of the crushing wheel. Rememberance of the Lord is not an inanimate-process. It is rather an awakening of true consciousness, a sparkle of eternal flash, which spreads all around. We know friction produces fire. Simran is also a type of friction, through which Truth sparkles out like gold from the goldsmith's glowing crucible."

Havildar : Wonderful ! This concept of Samadhi in a flame. A true path of God realization indeed, but it can be treaded only by firm believers.

Murid : You are right. Our Pir used to spend the whole day in bed, cosily wrapped up in the snug comfort of the quilt. From morning to evening he would keep writing his mystical experiences. The inkpot would spill over and cover the bedsheet with blots. We used to smile at his habits and he would laughingly comment, "these blots are the dark shadows of my heart". Look at him now. Ever since the Guru imparted to him a new vision of life, his face is aglow with the serenity of mental and spiritual discipline. His sloth has been banished and all his easy going habits forgotten. Now when he looks at his quilt he says :

'ਤੁਧੁ ਬਿਨੁ ਰੋਗ ਰਜਾਈਆਂ ਦਾ ਓਢਣ......।'

(Without you my Lord, the comfort and warmth of the quilt is like a pestilence).

He spends most of his time squatting on the cold and uneven floor outside the Guru's quarters. He has given up the quilt but has not given up writing. The only difference is that now he writes down the Guru's hymns in Persian script. He also keeps a daily record of the Guru's words and deeds. Another difference is that now he writes in red ink. When we asked him about it he said, "This is no ink at all. This is my heart's blood ! Pir Badrudin shed his blood on the battlefield, while I shed it on paper" Do you know that our Pir is a distant relation of Pir Badrudin. Both belong to the Syed sect and have great love and regard for each other. The only difference between the two is that while Syed Behmi Shah is an Ajmeri, Syed Badrudin is a Nizami.

Havildar : Who are the Nizamis ?

Murid : You must have heard of the great mystic fakir Nizammudin Aulya. In his lifetime he was known as Sultan-ul-Mashaikh (Sultan of the Sheikhs). His tomb is located in Delhi. Nizammudin was also a Syed. He was the disciple of Sheikh Farid-ul-Din Shakkarganj and the guru of the famous mystic poet, Amir Khusro. Syed Badrudin's ancestors were also Nizamis and his village Sadhaura was one of the major centres of the Nizami sect. A large estate had been given to him at Sadhaura by Syed Khizzar Khan, the Sultan of Delhi.[4] Pir Badrudin and Pir Behmi are both devout followers of the Guru and ready to lay down their lives for him. Pir Badrudin sacrificed his two sons in the battle of Bhangani. Pir Behmi has dipped his pen in his heart's blood to write out the saga of Guru Gobind Singh's sacrifice and heroism. Those who have seen him writing say that his eyes also glisten crimson with tears of blood.

(5)

According to the Khalsa Twarikh (Khalsa Twarikh Part III p 839) Pir Behmi was a very learned person. He had made a comparative study of all religions, not merely an academic study but had also gained practical experience of different religious practices. His method of writing also reflected his practical study. But now his writings depicted his thoughts ennobled by his meeting with Guru Gobind Singh. Normally, a writer before commencing his writings has first to ponder over what he has to write. Many a thought flow through his brain, like bubbles bursting over a stream, merging with the current aimlessly. The art of writing is like gathering the bursting and glowing thoughts into a comprehensive shape and then giving it a literary form in line with the author's considered objectives. These rambling thoughts have then to be strung like beads, each separate and distinct but linked together to support the ultimate theme, verily like a priceless necklace.

But when the subject is related to Guru Gobind Singh, the ordinary way of writing is of no use. It changes its pattern into a different orbit altogether. The mind becomes an active mine, overflowing with feelings, racing out in all directions. You have to change the ink. The new feelings have to be written with red ink as if the writer is shaping his thoughts in consonance with the current of his blood. Pir Behmi's red ink displayed this phenomenon.

What touched Pir Behmi most and stirred his inner depths was the Zafarnama (Epistle of Victory), a long letter in Persian verse written by Guru Gobind Singh and sent to Aurangzeb. What moved Pir Behmi was the Guru's whole hearted and unquestioning reliance on the Koranic oath. The Guru had a foretaste of Moghul oaths and had been sadly disillusioned. Despite an inner certainty that the oath taken on Koran was also false, he readily put his faith in it as it was backed by scriptural authority. The other party through their betrayal of the oath falsified the testimony of Koran and thereby defiled their faith. Through their actions they made a mockery of the sanctity of Koran. If there is any one, thus wrote Pir Behmi in his diary, who has shown utmost veneration for Koran and paid a very heavy price for upholding its sanctity, it is Guru Gobind Singh. Pinning his faith on the Koranic oath the Guru left the Anandpur fort and as a result had to sacrifice all his four sons and his holy mother.

After embracing the Sikh faith, Pir Behmi got a clearer perception of the Guru's philosophy and ideals. He now understood what was the real significance of the Guru's words.

"ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮੈ ਖੰਡਾ ਸਾਜ ਕੈ ਜਿਨ ਸਭ ਸੈਂਸਾਰ ਉਪਾਇਆ ।"

(Even before manifesting Himself in creation God created the Khanda (literally the double edged sword but figuratively the power of death).

The doctrine of the inevitability of death and other eternal truths were not merely preached by the Guru but he also translated those precepts into dynamic actions. Thus his teachings carried conviction and made the deepest impact on those who came in contact with him. That is how he could arouse in his followers a passion for death. Seeking death for a great cause became for them the culmination of their spiritual endeavour. Making an example of his own life he effaced all distinction between the Guru and the disciple. Truly has it been said of him :

ਵਾਹੁ ਵਾਹੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਆਪੇ ਗੁਰੁ ਚੇਲਾ ॥

(Praise be to Guru Gobind Singh who was not only a Guru but at the same time a disciple).

In India there has never been a dearth of philosophic and metaphysical treatises. The ancient Sanskrit texts like the Shastras and Smritis contain vast treasures of knowledge and wisdom. There has always been in this country a super-abundance of dialecticians skilled in the art of discussion and dissertation. What was lacking, however, was applying these principles in practice. In their commentaries on scriptures the learned Pundits and Acharyas dwelt at length on the nuances of meaning and subtleties of expression. They excelled in the art of pointing out metaphysical contradictions and exulted in getting involved in far fetched interpretations. But all this knowledge and wisdom found no place in the national life. Centuries of bondage had sapped the vitality of the masses and the philosophic teachings of the ancient seers had degenerated into meaningless dogma and lifeless ritual. A gulf had thus been created between precept and practice. Guru Gobind Singh realised the paramount necessity of bridging this gulf. With that end in view he employed as many as fifty two renowned scholars and poets to render into Brajbhasha the hallowed Sanskrit texts like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Through these translations he wanted to reveal to the national consciousness the glorious heritage of their ancient civilization so that the stagnant waters of the national life may flow once more through healthy channels. This monumental task was a twofold process. Firstly, it involved a translation from the language of the elite to the commonly understood language of the masses. The second process which was much more difficult, entailed a further translation into deeds of heroism in the national arena. That this was the ultimate objective is abundantly clear from the following couplet that the Guru wrote.

ਦਸਮ ਕਥਾ ਭਾਗਉਤ ਕੀ ਭਾਖਾ ਕਰੀ ਬਨਾਇ ॥
ਔਰ੍ ਬਾਸਨਾ ਨਾਹਿ ਕੁਛ ਧਰਮ ਜੁਧ ਕੇ ਚਾਇ ॥

Primarily he manifested these translations in the trials and tribulations of his own life which was full of supreme sacrifices, unmatched by any prophet or martyr. No wonder then that Pir Behmi dipped his pen in red for writing the saga of Guru Gobind Singh's life.

(6)

Murid and the havildar remained engaged in conversation till late in the night. This dialogue with Murid stirred the havildar to his depths but it did nothing to still the commotion in his soul. It brought him no solace. On the other hand it increased his anguish and deepened his inner turmoil. His mind sank further in the quagmire of depression. After they lay down to sleep, Murid was immediately engulfed in a peaceful slumber. But sleep eluded the havildar. A storm seemed to be raging in his soul. At last he got up and wandered out of the monastery. His footsteps seemed to be taking him nowhere. He seemed to be walking in a void as though under a hypnotic spell. Moving away from the village he reached the ruins of an old house. The moonlight gave it a weird and ghostly appearance. He gave a start at the sight of a heap of old bricks in the desolate courtyard. His face went deathly pale. As though drawn irresistibly by the heap, he picked up a brick with his left hand, then placed it in the open space of the courtyard. Repeating this process assiduously he raised a wall five feet high and six feet long. His manner betrayed the professional skill of a mason, though the tremulous efforts of the left hand could erect a structure which was both uneven and unstable.

His right hand rested motionless in the left inner pocket of his shirt. He now pulled it out with his left hand. His right arm seemed to be paralysed and lifeless. The fingers of his right hand were firmly locked around something tied in a silk handkerchief. One by one he pulled and straightened the fingers of his right hand. The handkerchief was of the finest multi-coloured Gulbarga silk. Tenderly and reverently he placed it in his lap. For long his fingers struggled with tight knots. At last the knots were untied. He took out of the handkerchief an irregular piece of broken brick and put it on top of the wall he had erected. He gazed long and pathetically at this treasure. Then he went down on his knees before it and began to pray. His voice low and almost inaudible at first, rose steadily to an agonised pitch. His prayer became an anguished wail from the depths of his tormented spirit :

"O Master of supernal realms, Lord of the day of judgement, send the hail of your doom on me for I do not deserve the shower of your grace. O Lord, hear my groans and ordain my punishment. Let your wrath fall upon me like a thunderbolt.

Consign me to the flames of hell for the fires of the earth are not enough to burn my sinful soul. I have carried this precious treasure close to my heart till my right hand and arm have been completely paralysed. I can carry it no more. Even my left arm is benumbed and the joints of my knees are swollen with walking long distances. Half my body is already dead. Let the other half also die and thus put an end to my miserable existence. Send me death in the most painful and insufferable form. I do not deserve to die comfortably in bed, nor do I deserve the long long repose in the grave. What I deserve is eternal perdition. I do not ask for the remission of my sins, what I ask for is your terrible retribution."

Suddenly he heard a great commotion. A band of horsemen galloped past him. The vibrations shook the unstable wall and it crashed down upon him. He was half buried under the bricks. The horsemen returned and thronged about him. All of them were stalwart, tall and fierce looking. Their bearded faces glowed with health and manhood. They were the Bairar Jat soldiers searching for the treasure that had been buried in a secret place at the behest of the Guru. They had overheard the havildar talking to himself of some precious treasure. Two of them dismounted and quickly removed the bricks under which he lay badly bruised. They made him stand up. In the moonlight they saw that his face wore a tortured expression.

For a moment he looked at their stern faces and shining spears. Then he closed his eyes and lifting his face to heavens said,

"I thank you Lord that you have heard my prayer and sent to me these harbingers of divine retribution. Welcome, O angels of doom, let your spear thrusts kill not only my body but also my anguished soul."

The Bairars exchanged glances.

"Crazy fellow !" said one.

"He is raving mad. Look at his eyes. These are the eyes of a lunatic."

"I think he is only feigning madness," said another, "He is trying to be clever with us."

"You son of the doomsday angel !" cried the first one, "Come off your act and tell us where the hidden treasure is."

"I have got it here", said the havildar without the least trepidation, "It is somewhere below this brickload. I can show it to you provided you give me my reward."

"What reward ?" shouted twelve impatient voices in unison.

"Only this, that all the twelve spears should be thrust into my heart."

The Bairars laughed.

"We shall see to that," said they, "Now where is the treasure ? Quick !"

The havildar started a frantic search beneath the bricks, At last he could identify the broken irregular piece of brick that he had carried next to his heart for months. Reverently he held it out to the horsemen.

"What nonsense is this," shouted they, "Where is the treasure of gold coins ?"

"This is far more precious," said the havildar, "than all the gold coins in the world. It is not only precious, it is consecrated. Take it and give me the promised reward."

"You ill fated wretch," shouted a horseman lifting his spear in consternation, "Trying to be funny with Jats. Here, take this for your reward."

His companion held him back saying—"Spare him. I am sure he is mad."

"I am not mad," shrieked the havildar, "I am in my senses. I wanted to present this treasure to the Guru and in return beg for his wrath and vengeance. For months have I followed him but the ignominy of my sin did not let me approach him. I am unable to carry this priceless treasure any longer. If you don't take it, I shall bury it here in a pit. Let the omniscient Guru find it when he will. But don't deprive me of my reward. I beseech you."

The horsemen left in dismay to search elsewhere.

The havildar again started looking into the pile of bricks. He was murmuring to himself. "My Lord was at a distance when I was praying, but when the spears were raised he had come near to intervene. How I wish he had not come. Now I realise why I cannot have his Darshan. He is the giver of life eternal. My demand was for my death, which he cannot give." The havildar had found his prize possession. He kissed it and wrapped it again in the silk handkerchief. He started to re-erect the wall and dig a pit alongside it. He wanted to sit in this pit when the bricks would again fall entombing him alive.

(7)

Just before daybreak when Murid got up, he grew anxious about the havildar. The other bed had obviously not been slept in. Murid had not liked the dazed, haunted look in the havildar's eyes. Murid dressed up hurriedly and went out of the monastery in search of his friend. When he reached the ruined outskirts of the village, he found the havildar digging a pit in the courtyard. Then the havildar carefully wrapped up the broken brick in the Gulbarga silk handkerchief and buried it in the pit. As the two returned to the monastery they found Ghani Khan and his daughter waiting for Murid who was an old acquaintance. Ghani Khan had brought his daughter on a visit to Chhattiana and had spent the night there.

The meeting with Ghani Khan and his daughter acted as a balm on the havildar's bruised heart. There emanated from both of them an aura of grace and bliss. The girl had large lustrous eyes, an angelic smile and a voice of flute-like quality that was enchanting. She seemed to combine in herself a womanly tenderness with the delightful innocence of a child. Her voice reminded him of the song he had heard her sing some months back in Machhiwara. She was the only grand daughter that Guru Gobind Singh, the lord of the blue heavens, had. She was the peerless pearl born of his flashing eyes. No wonder her face bloomed like a lotus radiating a soft fragrance. The recollection of that song and its musical intonations brought about a strange transformation in the havildar's whole being. For months he had been uncommunicative about his past. His sorrow had been congealed in his heart like a lump of ice. Suddenly there was a thaw and he felt irresistibly impelled to unburden his soul.

"Listen," he shouted in a sudden outburst that startled everyone, "Do you know who I am? I am the wretch that erected the accursed wall in Sirhind. No other mason would do it. Being an employee in the department that builds masonry works for the army, I could not say no. I had to comply with the army discipline, Yes, I am the one that bricked them up alive, the Guru's sons, the little angels. My head was in a whirl; my hands trembled and my conscience cursed me, but as though in the grip of a nightmare, I went on raising layers of brick and mortar. In my agitation I was not able to place the bricks in straight line. The wall fell down as soon as it was finished. A piece of brick that had been touching the hand of Sahibzada Zorawar Singh hit me in the chest. Immediately I caught hold of it and pressed it against my heart. A fit of madness seized my spirit. Shrieking wildly I fled out of Sirhind. Ever since have I kept that piece of brick pressed close to my heart. Only once did I remove it for a while, to wrap it up in a silk handkerchief which a Moghul soldier had brought from the Anandpur loot. He told me, it was the Guru's own handkerchief. Clasping the brick to my heart I followed the Guru from place to place. I wanted to prostrate myself before him and beseech, not his forgiveness but his wrath and retribution. My mind is torn by agony and remorse and my soul burns daily in the fire of chastisement. I want to die but I cannot die. Tell me why does death elude me so. O pray tell me."

"I will tell you why," said Murid consolingly, "See what Pir Behmi has written in his diary while discussing the Guru's philosophy of death.

'Death', writes the Pir, 'is not a punishment. It is the reward claimed by the brave and dauntless spirits. It is only the cowards who shudder at it. So long as man remains sunk in the morass of cowardice, death holds an innexorable sway over his mind. For those who have been endowed with true enlightenment, death has no terror. For them death is the ultimate fulfilment, the immutable essence of all creation. At the thought of death, an ecstatic joy overwhelms them for this thought provides them with a glimpse of their eternal home. Death is the ultimate test of fearlessness. This state of fearlessness can be attained only through the grace of Guru. Meditating on the flame of eternal consciousness, the enlightened souls seek the immolation like that of the moth. They long to be torn into shreds for the love of God. Through such a death they enter the deathless realms of the cosmic reality. Through such a death they sow the seeds of immortality in life and serve as beacons of inspiration to the faint spirits of lesser men.

Death is the consummation of life; it is not its anti-thesis. The anti-thesis of life is fear. The man who is haunted by fear of death is already dead. If there is anything that lives in him, it is fear. He eats and breathes only to keep his fear alive. Death is the right of the brave, who deserve to gain eternal life. It is only such heroes who are administered Amrit, the nectar of life eternal. Yes, it is the symbol of fearlessness, a stamp of supernal never-ending life. It is the sacred bond of the disciple with Guru Gobind Singh."

Ghani Khan could readily understand how the havildar's innate sensitivity had been wounded by the terrible Sirhind tragedy. With tender solicitude he now spoke to the havildar. Ghani Khan said, "Grieve no more and cast out remorse from your soul. It was not your fault. You acted only at the behest of others. Also stop seeking retribution at the hands of the Guru. The gracious Guru gives benediction, not punishment. The wall in Sirhind had falsehood for its foundation. Therefore it crashed. The sun of truth is about to rise in all its glory. The sahibzadas merely left the tabernacle of flesh. They have partaken of the divine nectar of martyrdom and have become immortal. Just peep into the sanctuary of your heart, at the place which bears the imprint of the consecrated brickbat. Unbutton your shirt and see."

The havildar did as Ghani Khan bade him. Looking at his bare chest he saw a vision haloed in a glowing light. His whole being was transported into ecstacy, and his face lit with divine glory.

"They are alive" he exclaimed, "The little angels".

"Look" cried Ghani Khan's daughter in an ecstatic tone, "The Sahibzadas !"

A warm radiation began to pulsate through the havildar's right hand. His paralysed arm became vibrant with life. An ethereal sensation thrilled every fibre of his being as he caught hold of the divine feet of the figures imprinted in his heart.

A profound aura of peace descended on all those present. Their faces were lit with reverence and their hearts were steeped in joy. Then in this mood of exalted fervour, the girl began to sing.

"I am his grand daughter
His grand daughter am I
The only one that he has
The Lord of the blue heavens
None else to share this honour with me.
A peerless pearl am I
Of his lusturous eyes am I born,
Two oceans of divine effulgence,
Those eyes !
With their luminous glance
They pierce the pearl of my heart
And make me his own."

REFERENCES

1. The complete stanza is as follows—

ਸਲਿਲ ਨਿਵਾਸ ਜੈਸੇ ਮੀਨ ਕੀ ਨ ਘਟੈ ਰੁਚਿ, ਦੀਪਕ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਘਟੈ ਪ੍ਰੀਤ ਨ ਪਤੰਗ ਕੀ ।
ਕੁਸਮ ਸੁਬਾਸ ਜੈਸੇ ਤ੍ਰਿਪਤੀ ਨ ਮਧੁਪ ਕੋ, ਉਡਤ ਅਕਾਸ਼ ਆਸ ਘਟੈ ਨ ਬਿਹੰਗ ਕੀ ।

ਘਟਾ ਘਨਘੋਰ ਮੋਰ ਚਾਤ੍ਰਿਕ ਰਿਦੈ ਉਲਾਸ, ਨਾਦ ਬਾਦ ਸੁਨਿ ਰਤਿ ਘਟੈ ਨ ਕੁਰੰਗ ਕੀ ।
ਤੈਸੇ ਪ੍ਰਿਆ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਰਸ ਰਸਿਕ ਰਸਾਲ ਸੰਤ, ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਘਟਤ ਨ ਪ੍ਰਬਲ ਅੰਗ ਅੰਗ ਕੀ ।
(ਵਾਰਾਂ ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ)

2. ਨਿਜਘਰ ਤੇ ਸੁਰੰਗ ਕੇ ਰਾਹੂ । ਜਾਇ ਮੁਜਾਵਰ ਮੰਦਰ ਮਾਹੂ ।
ਅੰਦਰ ਦੇਇ ਕਮਾਨ ਚਢਾਇ । ਇਸ ਬਿਧਿ ਰਾਖੀ ਬਨਤ ਬਨਾਇ ।
(ਸੂਰਜ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼)

(Things were manipulated in this fashion. From his residence the priest would go to the sanctum through this secret tunnel and string up the arrow on the bow of the prince whom he wanted to favour).

3. ਮਾਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਕੋ ਹੁਕਮ ਬਖਾਨਾ । ਖਰੇ ਹੋਹੁ ਕਰ ਸਿਖ ਸੁਜਾਨਾ ।
ਲੈ ਆਗਯਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਬਨਵਾਯੋ । ਖਰੇ ਹੋਇ ਤਤਕਾਲ ਛਕਾਯੋ ।
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਮੁਖ ਤੇ ਤਬ ਨਾਮ ਉਚਾਰਯੋ । ਸੁਭ ਅਜਮੇਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਤਹਿੰ ਧਾਰਯੋ ।
(ਸੂਰਜ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼)

(At the Guru's bidding Man Singh had the Amrit (ceremonial water stirred with a double-edged sword while scriptures are being recited) prepared and then administered to the Pir. After this baptism the Guru gave him the name Ajmer Singh.)

4. When Syed Khizzar Khan became the Sultan of Delhi he sanctioned an estate of the value of rupees sixty thousand to Syed Nizammudin. The ninth successor of Nizammudin was Pir Badrudin, mentioned as Pir Buddhu Shah in Sikh history.

(Karam Singh's Banda Bahadur').

MIRACLE OF THE PEN

[ਕਲਮ ਦੀ ਕਰਾਮਾਤ]

In the court of Moghul emperor Bahadur Shah the courtiers stood on both sides of the throne, arrayed in ceremonial robes. Their attitude was marked by extra reverence and awe because of the presence of Guru Gobind Singh in the court. A dialectical dialogue was in progress between some Muslim ulemas and Guru Gobind Singh. A Syed wanted to know from the Guru whether there was any truth in the possibility of miracles. The Guru answered :

"Miracles are possible. For instance a single word from the emperor's mouth can turn a pauper into a rich man; it can sentence a living man to death, grant him reprieve or even amnesty."[1]

This answer did not satisfy the Syed. His real intention had been to provoke the Guru to show a miracle. He now made his purpose clear whereupon the Guru took out a gold coin from his pocket and said, "Here is another miracle"[2].

This irritated the Syed further. He thought the Guru was making fun of him.

"Look, Syed Sahib," continued Guru Gobind Singh, "This dinar has great miraculous powers. By paying this to a soldier you can send him to voluntary death in the battle."

The Syed was furious at the manner in which the Guru was parrying his questions but he controlled his temper and said—

"Sire, do you have a miracle of your own" ?[3]

This time what reply did the Guru give ? He suddenly unsheathed his sword[4]. All those present in the court stared in stark amazement. For none could unsheath his sword in the presence of the emperor. Such an act could be construed as a challenge to the emperor's authority and invite royal wrath. The Syed turned pale. One look at the Guru's sword, that flashed like summer lightning, put him at his wits' end Pointing to his sword the Guru said, "Syed Saheb, here is a miracle of my own. In less than a split second it can separate your head from your body, put an end to your persistent questioning and bring peace to your troubled spirit. Would that not be a miracle ?"[5]

Guru Gobind Singh was a swordsman par excellence. The contemporary poets have used variegated similies and metaphors while writing about his sword. The court poet Hans Ram went to the extent of identifying the Guru's sword with the Kalpa Brikhsha the mythological tree which is believed to grant all seekers, their wishes[6].

Like the Kalpa Brikhsha, the Guru's sword granted the abject supplications of cowards and spared their lives. Like the beneficent tree it could also grant the boon of a brave and glorious death to the heroes.

Unquestionably, Guru Gobind Singh was a master swordsman, but it was his father, the ninth Guru who bore the name 'Teg Bahadur'. Did the ninth Guru really wield any sword ? If so, what kind of sword ? If not, how was his name an apposite one ?

To be able to appreciate the miracle of Guru Gobind Singh's sword, it is essential to understand the miracle of the spirit that the ninth Guru showed.

The kshatriya's of Hindustan requested the moghul emperor Aurangzeb to stop religious persecution and forcible conversions to Islam. The brahmins, they pleaded, were the leaders of their faith; if the emperor could persuade the brahmins to embrace Islam, the kshatriyas would not demur. Thus the kshatriyas transferred their woe to the brahmins.[7]

The brahmins were now asked to accept Islam within a year or leave the country, failing which they would be exterminated. A deputation of brahmins came to Guru Teg Bahadur and narrated their tale of woe. They hoped that the Guru, as his name denoted, would take up his sword against the Moghul tyranny and lead them to deliverance.[8]

A strange situation indeed! The kshatriyas had shifted responsibility to the brahmins. The brahmins, in their turn, again passed it on to a kshatriya. But the Guru was a true kshatriya, conscious of his warrior role.

The brahmins had word sent to the Emperor that if he could convert Teg Bahadur to Islam all the brahmins and kshatriyas would readily acquiesce to change their faith. The Guru was imprisoned and subjected to indignity and torture.

The emperor said,

"His disciples call him the true king. Let him, therefore, show a miracle so that we may also have faith in his true kingdom."[9]

The Guru agreed to show only one miracle.

"Smite my neck with the sharpest sword you can find," he said, "and it will not even scratch my skin."[10]

Accordingly a sharp sword was brought. An expert executioner tested its edge with professional skill. The Guru sat down cross-legged. There was an aura of perfect peace about him and his brow was resplendent. The executioner struck with all his might. The head rolled down. The crowd of spectators was painfully disappointed. What sort of a miracle was this? They could not understand.

Indeed this miracle corresponded to Emerson's definition—

"Self sacrifice is the real miracle out of which all the reported miracles grow."

But only he can perform this miracle whose mind is not visited by any conflict or foreboding that his self sacrifice might not bear fruit. According to an old Christian proverb—

'He never errs who sacrifices himself.'

The age of Moghul tyranny called for the self sacrifice of brave spirits. It called for those warriors of the spirit whom the sight of the executioner should fill with ecstacy and the touch of his sword with eternal bliss, those who through true self-realization, had gained abiding faith in the immortality of human soul and the worthlessness of the body frame. The times called for a supreme martyr who should sow the seed of his head. Guru Teg Bahadur sowed this seed. The latent potentiality in the seed gently cracked its outer shell even as the Guru broke the earthen vessel of his body on the emperor's head.[11]

In course of time the seed sprouted into a manifold harvest of heroic spirits who faced the Moghul persecution with unflinching courage and faith.

* * *

In England there is a town called Bury St. Edmund. This town is known for a famous monument where a king's head lies buried. A thousand years ago, England had been subjected to persistent Danish invasions. These invasions were more in support of religious beliefs than for political gains. The English forces were led by the Christian King Edmund. After a decisive defeat Edmund was captured by the heathen Danish soldiers. He was offered a choice between recantation and death. He was told that if he disavowed his Christian beliefs he would be allowed to retain his kingdom. Edmund chose death. He was tied to a tree and exposed to the heathen archers as a living target for their marksmanship. This pathetic scene has been painted by many renowned painters. Even a look at these paintings pricks one's heart with a thousand arrows. The truth is that martyrs never feel any pain. It is the onlookers who suffer the pangs. This truth is brought out very vividly in these paintings of king Edmund's martyrdom.

Through sheer boredom the archers finally ended their sport with Edmund and he was beheaded with a sword. After a hard search Edmund's countrymen could come upon his severed head. They buried and entombed it at a place where the town of Bury St. Edmund now stands.

Edmund's martyrdom was an epoch making event in history which established Christianity on a firm footing in England and put an end to Danish persecutions.

Many churches were built to commemorate Edmund's martyrdom. On the walls of these churches are engraved the words :

'The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church'.

* * *

The drama of Guru Gobind Singh's life began when he was barely nine years old. From the seed sown by Guru Teg Bahadur there had sprung up many heroes eager to show the miracle of the head which the ninth Guru had shown. Symbolic of the harvest of these brave spirits were the five beloveds who unwincingly offered their heads to Guru Gobind Singh. They were dragged into the tent but they were not beheaded. For, in spirit, they had already balanced their heads on the palms of their hands and their only fear was lest the Guru should spurn their offering. Balancing the head on the palm, while one is yet alive, and to laugh at the discomfiture of the executioner, is the ultimate miracle of the human spirit. It may be called the miracle of the head. It was this miracle which Guru Teg Bahadur had agreed to show to the Moghul emperor.

* * *

Guru Gobind Singh accomplished many tasks during his lifetime-each more difficult than the other. At each crisis his conduct was guided purely by ethical considerations. His ethics was based on realisation of truth. Without such a realisation ethics is like a multi-storeyed mansion, tottering on a weak foundation. Again ethos is not of uniform complexion or texture. Hindu ethos is different from Semitic ethos. Hindu ethics has as its basis, the realisation of truth while the Semitic code is based on dogma. The Semitic code is also based on the dualistic concept of religion which recognizes Satan as the source of all evil. According to this concept there is eternal warfare between God and Satan. An undercurrent of this warfare can be seen in the art, literature and philosophy of all Semitic faiths. Faiths that ascribe good and evil to different sources do not recognize the possibility of a compromise between the two. Good and evil must fight and fight to the last.

Only one can survive, not both. Religions that had their origin in India do not believe in Satan. The gods and demons of Hindu mythology fight but compromise is not ruled out. Truce can be declared and peace can be negotiated. According to Hindu thought a demon, howsoever heinous his actions may be, has a soul which can never be totally lacking in goodness. This concept is illustrated by the story of Raja Hirenkashyap.

Hirenkashyap was a demon king. He conquered many lands and established his sway even over Devapuri and Indrapuri, the abode of gods. He turned them out and made them homeless. Such was his terror that at the mention of Hirenkashyap's name, Indra and his legions trembled with mortal fear. Ultimately they sought refuge with God. Thereupon Hirenkashyap turned his wrath upon God, the protector of the weak and homeless. This put God in great difficulty. Wherever He went He found Hirenkashyap in hot pursuit. God could not find a suitable hiding place to escape from the demon. Finally in a desperate bid he hid himself in Hirenkashyap's heart and thus saved himself from the demon's vengeance.[12]

A demon is always an extrovert. He never peeps into his heart. Were he to do so he would no longer be a demon. A searching look in his own heart would turn him into a god.

According to Hindu thought and philosophy all evil is only superficially so. Inside it has a core which is good and wholesome. On the other hand Semitic religions believe in Satan as a source of nothing but evil. This, in essence, is the difference between the Indian and the Semitic religious beliefs. According to the Hindu way of thinking goodness lies ensconced beneath every evil and inside every demon there is potential godliness.

This is also the Sikh belief :

ਬੁਰਾ ਨਹੀ ਸਭੁ ਭਲਾ ਹੀ ਹੈ ਰੇ ਹਾਰ ਨਹੀ ਸਭ ਜੇਤੈ

(ਕਾ: ਮ: 5, ਸਫਾ 1302)

(All evil, in essence, is good and in every defeat lies the seed of victory)

The Semitic concept also has its ramifications. There are those who follow the Islamic Shariat dogmatically and those who, like the Sufis are more liberal in interpreting its tenets. Down the ages the liberals have always suffered persecution at the hands of the obscurantists.

Aurangzeb was a strict believer in Shariat. In his dungeons was imprisoned Sarmad, a renowned Sufi saint whose only crime was that he had flouted the dogmas of Shariat. Sarmad was told to undertake to observe Shariat or be ready to face death.

Sarmad chose to face the executioner. The sight of the executioner's face always fills the heart of the victim with terror. But Sarmad's soul was made of different fabric. In his liberalism he had imbibed the spirit of Indian philosophy and could see the spark of goodness in every evil. He peeped into the heart of the executioner and caught a glimpse of God who had hid himself in the demon's heart. He stretched out his arms towards the executioner and, swaying in ecstasy, said :

"Come ! Come, my beloved. I know you. In whatever disguise you may come you will find my soul longing to embrace you."[12]

Sarmad's philosophy thus approximated to the Indian theological concepts.

A great contemporary of Sarmad was Guru Gobind Singh whose outlook was even more liberal and enlightened. And a far more cruel and dreadful executioner than Sarmad's was Aurangzeb himself. The hands of this executioner were besmeared with the blood of the innocent children of Guru Gobind Singh and the fire of fanaticism in his eyes had scorched all the verdure that had been left in the Indian landscape. The Hindus bewailed their fate and wondered where their God was and why did He not come to their rescue ? But there was only one person who had knowledge of God's hiding place.

Guru Gobind Singh wrote a long letter, composed in Persian verse, to Aurangzeb in which he exposed all the misdeeds of the Moghul emperor and exhorted him to peep into his own heart.

Aurangzeb was the demon Hirenkashyap of his times. Terrified by his cruelty and inhumanity, God had sought refuge in the tyrant's soul. Only Guru Gobind Singh was able to see the divine spark in Aurangzeb's conscience. In his letter, addressing the Emperor he said :

ਕਿ ਰੌਸ਼ਨ ਜ਼ਮੀਰ ਅਸਤ ਹੁਸਨਲ ਜਮਾਲ ॥
ਖੁਦਾਵੰਦਿ ਬਖਸ਼ਿੰਦਹਏ ਮੁਲਕੋ ਮਾਲ ॥82॥ (ਜ਼ਫ਼ਰਨਾਮਾ)

(Your conscience, I am sure, has the divine spark in it. Look at yourself in the light of this spark. Thus will you realise your true worth for you are something more than a mere conqueror of lands and a hoarder of treasures.)

What effect did these words have on the Emperor who lay sick and bedridden. The effect was strange and disturbing. For the first time in his life he looked inwards. Conscience ! What conscience ! Did he really have a conscience ! Having it, how could he sentence his own father to lifelong imprisonment ? How could he betray his own brothers and execute them mercilessly. How could he persecute his hapless Hindu subjects ?

The Guru's letter reached him at a crucial moment when his life was ebbing away fast and the light in his eyes was fading. The Guru's letter was an attempt to turn the light of conscience on the dying Emperor and to awaken the dormant goodness in his soul. He wrote :

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ਕਿ ਬਖ਼ਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕਬੀਰ ਅਸਤ ਦਰ ਜੰਗ ਕੋਹ ॥
ਮਲਾਯਕ ਸਿਫ਼ਤ ਚੂੰ ਸੁਰੱਯਾ ਸ਼ਿਕੋਹ ॥93॥ (ਜ਼ਫ਼ਰਨਾਮਾ)

(With a heart of stone you stand like a mountain in the battle-field. Yet you are not totally bereft of the angelic qualities of a charitable heart and a gracious soul.)

Was it true, wondered Aurangzeb. He again turned his gaze inwards. Dark as the night was his soul. Then amid the pitch darkness he perceived a dim struggling light. Was this what the Guru called the divine spark. Its one faint glimpse had been enough to reveal to him the dreadful blackness of his misdeeds. He felt faint and trembled. There was cold sweat on his brow. In a weak voice he called out to his scribe and dictated a letter to his son Kam Bakhash.

"My darling son :

On the eve of my departure from this life I feel pity for your haplessness. But it is useless to mourn the irrevocable.

Whatever evil or good that I have done, I am taking alongwith me. Isn't it strange that I had come all alone into this world but while leaving it I am accompanied by the caravan of my deeds ?"

The emperor was interrupted by a relapse into faintness. Guru Gobind Singh's letter flickered before his eyes. This epistle from the 'pir of the infidels' had brought him comfort on his death bed. Perhaps there was, after all, a hope for even a sinner like him. In a voice which was barely a whisper he continued to dictate :

"God Almighty is my only hope. None else can help me !"

After another silence he resumed the dictation :

"I am troubled by premonitions about the empire and the dread of death. I do not know what is in store for me. I have sinned grievously and heavily shall I pay for my misdeeds."

(Wakai Alamgir page 71-72)

This was Aurangzeb's last letter, written when his life had been almost vanquished by the victorious forces of death. The hour of death is dreaded by all but for an emperor it is a particularly humiliating and frustrating experience. The rebel fever flouts the imperial authority and the bodyache refuses to obey the royal command. Even the most trustworthy companion namely one's own heart starts beating fitfully till, slowly and imperceptibly, death lays its icy hand on mighty monarchs.

* * *

The demon Hireṇkashyap did ultimately find God who had hidden himself in his heart. The Puranas give a detailed account of how this happened. Aurangzeb, the Hirenkashyap of the seventeenth century discovered God through the exhortations of Guru Gobind Singh. Even after life-long persecution, the martyrdom of his father and the harrowing execution of his four sons, Guru Gobind Singh did not lose the equanimity of an enlightened soul. His letter to the Moghul emperor titled 'Zafar Nama' or the 'Epistle of Victory' was among the greatest achievements of Guru Gobind Singh. During his lifetime the Guru showed many miracles of the sword. This, on the other hand, was the miracle of his pen, and was no less great.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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(ਸੂਰਜ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼)

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ਇਹੁ ਅਜ਼ਮਤ ਲਿਹੁ ਦੂਤੀ ਬਿਚਾਰੇ ॥
(ਉਕਤ)

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(ਉਕਤ)

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ਤਤ ਛਿਨ ਬਦਨ ਪੀਤ ਹੁਇ ਗਏ ॥
ਲੋਚਨ ਸਮੁਖ ਨ ਕਰਤੇ ਭਏ ॥
(ਸੂਰਜ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼)

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ਪੁਨਹਿ ਜਵਾਬ ਸੁਵਾਲ ਨ ਹੋਵੈ ॥ ਜੀਵਨ ਬਾਦ ਬਾਦ ਕਰ ਖੋਵੈਂ ॥
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ਮੂਤਨ ਸੁਹੀਨ ਨਿਤ ਬਾਢਤ ਪੁਨੀਤ ਹੈ ॥
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ਬਾਹਮਣ ਗਲ ਪਾ ਦਈ ਬਲਾਇ ॥
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ਜਿਮ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਖਾਵੈਂ ਦਿਖਾਓਂ ਸੋਊ ਬਾਤ ॥

ਜਿਮ ਤੁਮ ਪਾਤਸਾਹ ਸੱਚੋ ਸਦਾਵੈਂ ॥
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(ਉਕਤ)

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(ਉਕਤ)

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ਤੇਗ ਬਹਾਦਰ ਸੀ ਕ੍ਰਿਆ ਕਰੀ ਨ ਕਿਨਹੂੰ ਆਨ ॥
(ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹੀ 10 ਬਚਿਤ੍ਰ ਨਾਟਕ)

12. ਭਗਵਾਨ ਨੇ ਵਿਚਾਰ ਕੀਆ ਕਿ ਮੈਂ ਜਹਾਂ ਭੀ ਜਾਊਂਗਾ ਯਹ (ਵਹੀਂ ਚਲਾ ਜਾਏਗਾ ਅਰ ਜੈਸੇ ਮੌਤ ਪ੍ਰਾਣੀਉਂ ਕਾ ਪੀਛਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਛੋੜਤੀ ਵੈਸੇ ਹੀ ਯਹ ਮੇਰਾ ਪੀਛਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਛੋੜੇਗਾ । ਜਿਸ ਲੀਏ ਮੁਝੇ ਇਸ ਬਾਹਿਰ ਦ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਟੀ ਵਾਲੇ ਕੇ ਹਿਰਦੇ ਮੇਂ ਹੀ ਪ੍ਰਵੇਸ਼ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੀਏ ।

[ਸ੍ਰੀਮਦ ਭਗਵਤ ੮.੧੯.੮੯]

[God knew that wherever He went the demon would pursue him. Just as the human beings cannot dodge death, similarly He would not be able to thwart Hirenkashayp's pursuit. Therefore, the safest course for Him would be to take refuge in the demon's heart.

(Sri Madh Bhagvat, 8.19.89]

12. ਫਿਦਾਏ ਤੋਂ ਸ਼ਵਮ, ਬਿਆ, ਬਿਆ, ਬ-ਹਰ ਸੂਰਤੇ ਕਿ ਮੇ ਆਈ ਮਨ ਤ਼ਰਾ ਖੂਬ ਮੇ ਸ਼ਨਾਸਮ ॥

IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY

[ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈ]

Bhai Manoraj Singh is a very dear friend of mine. Last summer he spent a few days with me in Dehra Dun on his way to Mussourie. One morning he suddenly started narrating his life story to me—

"I am a Sikh by birth", he began, "though I was born in a Hindu family. For many years after their marriage no child was born to my parents. They prayed to Guru Nanak that, should they be blessed with a son, they would have him baptized as a Sikh."

"As a matter of fact", continued Manoraj Singh after a brief pause, "I have written my complete autobiography. If you could just glance through it and vet it, may be some one may agree to publish it."

Saying this he took out a frightfully big bundle of papers from his bag and without even a hint of warning started reading—

"My parents were orthodox Hindus. My father Kashinath had his ancestral house in Wazirabad and my mother belonged to Kunjah in Distt. Gujrat. My uncle Tirath Ram had great veneration for saints and was a disciple of the Udasi[1] mahant Udho Das. His wife, that is my aunt, was the daughter of Chaudhri Shri Chandi Prasad of mohalla Chirrimaran in Lahore......"

Disheartened by the prospect of a marathon session I interrupted him discreetly—"Your life story seems to be long and eventful : Why not take it up after dinner when we shall have lots of leisure."

After dinner I sat up alone and tackled the heap. Even the foreword made awesome reading. The author had traced his lineage back to the legendary hero Raja Rasaloo. The genealogical table was a bit complicated but impressive. Tediously I waded through the voluminous manuscript, a welter of events more of personal significance than of any social or historical value. Only in Chapter III, I came across an inspired piece of writing in a style of rare simplicity, beauty and grace. At this unexpected discovery I felt amply rewarded for my pains.

By the time Bhai Manoraj Singh returned from Mussourie I had retailored this chapter and subdivided it into as many as thirteen sections. At my request the author wrote out the finale which I have added as the fourteenth section.

This chapter from my friend's memoirs contains a beautiful exposition of Guru Nanak's philosophy of service to humanity, as the readers will, no doubt, find out for themselves. They will also appreciate the distinction between the impartiality of Vedanta[2] and the impartiality of Gurmat. The ideal of service was adopted by the Sikh Saints not merely on ethical grounds. For them service of humanity was a spiritual adjunct to the process of God-realization through meditation. While throwing light on such metaphysical issues this chapter recounts the story of a few such persons who moulded their lives in accordance with the following precept preached by Guru Nanak :

ਵਿਚਿ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈਐ ॥
ਤਾ ਦਰਗਾਹ ਬੈਸਣੁਪਾਈਐ ॥
(ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗੁ ਮ:, ੧ (ਮ. ੧, ਪੰਨਾ 26)

(Those who serve humanity in this world get a place of honour in the next)

I

The road from Rishikesh to Hardwar passes through a thick jungle called "Moti Chur Forest." Just after crossing the jungle one comes across a stream known as 'Sasua'. A narrow bridge spans the crystal clear waters, flowing perennially. One day during my rambles, as I walked absent-mindedly along Sasua's bank, my eyes caught sight of a small dry hillock right in the midst of the stream. This small land mass divided the rivulet into two branches which, after encircling the hillock, became one again. The time was late afternoon. The slanting rays of the sun touched everything with an ethereal beauty. Refracted through the verdure of the green forest the mellow sunlight broke into a thousand variegated hues. Under the magic of the glorious sun the shingle scattered on the hillock emitted a rare brightness and shed a gorgeous medley of colours.

Turning my back to the hillock, as I again glanced along the bank I noticed a small thatched hut against the backdrop of a ripe sugarcane field. I have never been able to resist sugarcane, I made for the field but just outside the hut my feet were transfixed. A middle-aged woman of striking appearance sat cross-legged on the mud floor of the hut. Her eyes were half closed and her face turned towards the hillock. For a while I stood rooted to the ground, my gaze fixed involuntarily on her glowing face. Suddenly I heard a sound of footsteps behind me. Turning round I saw a man, long past his prime, take off a heavy load of sugarcane from his head and throw it on the ground beside him. Later on I came to know that his name was Dhanna Singh. He cleaned up his turban, then straightening it spoke to the woman in the hut :

"Look Paro, who has come ! Our poor hut has been honoured by the visit of a *guru ka lal*."[3]

These three words '*guru ka lal*' acted like a charm. They swept away the distance between us. The two no longer looked like strangers to me. In a moment they had made me their own. A moment ago there had been a stretch of darkness between us. Dhanna Singh's words changed that darkness into a blaze of love. In that blaze, to my amazement, I saw some strangely familiar glimpses of past incarnations. It seemed I had seen those faces and heard those voices before. Was it a dream, a hallucination, a web woven by the magic of words ? More truly this was a miracle of faith—faith in the undying love of the gracious Guru. '*Guru ka Lal*' were no mere words that Dhanna Singh's tongue had uttered. These were the vibrant arms of a love-drunk disciple who with one arm kept clasped to the lotus feet of his Guru took with the other a brother disciple in a warm embrace. At the magnetic touch of this vibrant medium a wonderous current swept through my frame. The thought of being the 'Guru's darling son' suffused my being with a rosy brilliance. Paro came out of the hut treading imperceptibly. When she spoke, it was in a soft melodious voice. Her words fell like rose petals on green grass :

"Truly we are blessed", she said, "Blessed that you should come to this humble abode."

Saying this she again turned her half closed gaze towards the hillock where the shingle now glittered like the last flare of dying lamps.

Suddenly the sun sank behind the hilly horizon. The mountain shadows made quick encroachment on the lingering patches of light. The high pine trees loomed larger than they had seemed during the day. Raven like darkness quickly engulfed the scene. It all seemed to have happened so suddenly that my heart was gripped by a vague nameless fear. How would I be able to return home in such pitch darkness ? The prospect of a long trek through the thick dark jungle was indeed disturbing. The fear of meeting a night prowler made my flesh creep.

II

Finally I rejected the idea of returning home as being outside the realm of possibilty. Or was it the subtle currents of Dhanna Singh's welcome which held back my footsteps. Even when his arm was not swung around my shoulders I could feel the warmth of his embrace. Paro's face was tranquil and happy. Her heart seemed to be brimming over with gratitude at the opportunity to offer hospitality to a lost wayfarer. I saw their happiness and was glad to be the cause of it though my anxiety to return home did not completely leave me. The fare was of coarse maize bread and cooked mustard leaves. I had misgivings about drinking the river water which usually is contaminated. Therefore, I washed down my food with large gulps of sugarcane juice. The waves of juicy coolness engulfed all my anxiety about reaching home. . . . . .

It took the slow moon a long time to climb up the heavens and peep through the tall mountain pines. Until then thick darkness persisted. In the stillness of the night the rivulet had grown noisier. Dhanna Singh and Paro had climbed up a *machan* to guard the sugarcane field against the spoils of the wild boar. I was left alone in the hut. After some fitful sleep, I woke up at midnight. From where I lay I could clearly see through the half open door of the hut, the hillock in midstream. I also vividly saw someone sitting on the hillock. Then I closed my eyes and lapsed into a doze. I woke up and came out to have a closer look. The hillock was bathed in moonlight but I did not find anyone there. The shingle and stones shone like diamonds. Suddenly a shadow flitted across the moonlit surroundings. Fear gripped me.

"Who is there ?" I shouted.

"Don't be afraid, son," a disembodied voice replied, "I am coming to you."

After a while I heard someone wading noisily through the stream. Then a shadow bent down low on the bank to rub the water off its wet limbs. In another moment a scantily clad figure stood before me.

"Cast out all fear from your mind, son." He repeated, "One need not be afraid of *Fakirs*. Like you I am also a disciple of Guru Nanak. Just stay here and I shall be back in a while."

Saying this he went into the hut. At the doorstep he looked back and said :

"I shall take just a spot of *Sarghi*[4] after which I shall join you."

I was already confused and nervous. The word '*Sarghi*' started a new train of thought. Was this man a Muslim ? Though my mind was in a whirl, I did recollect that this was the month of Ramadan,[5] when all devout Muslims observe fast. But it did sound rather queer— a Muslim *fakir* going into a Sikh household to partake *Sarghi*. Everything in this place was mystifying. Nothing was normal. The glitter of the stones on the hillock bathed in moonlight again attracted my gaze and filled my dazed mind with a dull stupor. Just then someone gently placed his hand on my shoulder and said :

"I have done with my *Sarghi.*"

In an effort to pick up conversation I said somewhat awkwardly.

"I know that you are a Muslim *fakir* and from the dialect you speak I can make out that you belong to eastern U. P."

"Your surmise is incorrect," he replied, "I am not a U.P. man. I am a pathan. My mother tongue is Pushto. Having spent the best part of my life among the Panjabis, I can speak Panjabi and Urdu fluently. As regards my being a Muslim, the fact is immaterial. A *fakir* follows no organized religion. He is neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. A *fakir* is only a wayfarer. What religion can one observe during one's rambles. The only religion which a traveller can have is to tread the path before him. Fasting is not a religion with me; it is a way of life. My ancestors observed fasts as a religious injunction. With me, as I said, it is only a way of life."

I said. "Sir, this distinction between a religious tenet and a way of life is rather subtle. Perhaps what you mean is that your ancestors were fanatical in their approach whereas you are less rigid."

The *fakir* laughed and said, "This again is not a correct surmise. My earliest known ancestor was an epitome cf liberalism. His name was Moghul Khan but he was not a Moghul. He was a pathan. His name often confused people. He was a professional soldier who fought many battles and partook in many locts and holocausts. The last battle he fought was against the Sikhs in the time of Guru Gobind Singh. He was mortally wounded in this battle. While he gasped for the last breath someone dripped water in his parched mouth. This was no ordinary water but the elixir of life. Whose was the hand that poured this divine nectar down the arid throat ? What was the identity of the saviour ? He was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim. He was a God-realised soul who treated all human beings alike.

For him there was no distinction between friend and foe, no dichotomy between precept and practice."

Interrupting the narrative, I asked with unseemly impatience :

"What was this good man's name ?"

The *fakir* suddenly lapsed into silence. Then he closed his eyes.

By this time the moon had descended very low. In the east one could see vague signs of the approaching dawn. The distant mountains grew clearer in outline and their sharp edges were suffused with a rosy radiance. In the struggling light of the daybreak, I could now see vividly my companion's face. He had an unusually thin chin and his high cheek bones made his eyes look narrow and sunken.

III

He remained silent for a while. Then turning his face towards the low hillock, he opened his eyes. Tears coursed down his face as he uttered repeatedly—

"Blessed is the memory of Bhai Kannayya."

After a moment's silence, he again addressed me.

"Just think, all this happened in a battlefield. A battle royal was raging. Flames of hatred leapt high. The only one whom this conflagration left untouched was Bhai Kannayya. I am not mentioning Guru Gobind Singh, for he was a supreme being transcending humanity, an incarnation of the cosmic Master Himself. But Bhai Kannayya was a mortal like us. Among the mortals if there was any one unconsumed by the blaze of passions, it was Bhai Kannayya. The guns boomed and the matchlocks spat fire but Bhai Kannayya stood unmindful, as though ensconced in a grotto of ice, ministering to the needs of the wounded wretches. To him Hindus and Muslims, friends and foes looked alike."

"Bhai Kannayya was a true Vedanti." I said interrupting the narrative once again.

"Perhaps he was", continued my companion, "Perhaps he was not. Vedanta also teaches the concept of impartiality but essentially from the intellectual standpoint. It is lacking in emotional content. Therefore in practice the Vedantic concept often develops cracks though in theory it looks perfect and unassailable. Bhai Kannayya's approach was, in essence, an emotional approach. It was born out of a deep ocean of love. He bore the same love for humanity as he bore for his Guru. Smelted by his intense love for the Guru, he imbibed the Guru's spirit which saw all human beings cast in the same divine mould. Among the wounded he saw neither friend nor foe. In all those faces distorted by agony he saw only the dear face of Guru Gobind Singh. The thought that it was his Guru lying wounded in the battlefield wrenched his heart and made him rush around desperately, with a bucket of water and the medicine chest. In the piteous groans of the wounded he heard his Guru's voice and it filled his heart with deep anguish. It was this anguish which made all distinction between Sikhs and Muslims, friends and foes totally irrelevant. This was the impartiality of Bhai Kannayya rooted in divine love. This was the embracing love of an enlightened and sublime soul. Its circumference had love for its centre-love for the Guru and love for humanity. The Vedantic concept is centred around intellect but not love, though the circumference in both cases is the same."

IV

So absorbed were we in this conversation that for a while we did not notice Dhanna Singh who had climbed down the *machan* and now stood behind us. The *fakir* asked him about the whereabouts of Paro.

"She has just left," answered Dhanna Singh, "A message had been received from the village that Ramu, whose condition has been bad for many days, is now knocking at death's door and his wife Ramdevi is inconsolable. Paro left immediately. I have stayed back to inform you."

Without a word the *fakir* quickly got up and made for the village. As I also turned to accompany him Dhanna Singh tried to hold me back with the words—

"Take a spot of *Sattu*[6] before you go."

I heeded him not and followed the footsteps of the *fakir*. His words still coursed through my brain. The same circle, the same circumference but two different centres ! The love, the emotion, the anguish and the desperation ! And the distinction from Vedant ! What exactly did he mean ? And where are we going now. What is this sudden digression ? I had a strange feeling that the *fakir* was still silently continuing his dissertation.

I looked back and saw Dhanna Singh following us. He carried a paper bag half filled with *Sattu* and a big bowl of syrup. In another twenty minutes we reached the village.

V

In the corner of a mud hut the dying man lay on a bed of dry hay. The *fakir* put his hand on the burning forehead and asked soothingly :

"How are you, my son" ?

The dying man half opened his eyes. The voice seemed familiar to his ears. He half raised his right hand in salutation but it fell back quickly. The eyes opened wide in a death trance and noisily the last breath escaped through the throat. Clasping his lifeless feet to her breast his wife raved with grief—

"Whither have you gone ? Why have you left me all alone in this cruel world ? How at all shall I live without you ? Take me along ? Oh take me along !"

Then suddenly she left her husband's feet and threw herself into Paro's arms. After about five minutes when Paro disengaged herself gently, Ramdevi could not stand. The *fakir* helped her lie down on the ground. When they looked at her closely they saw that life had fled from her body. She had already joined her husband.

All of a sudden the stillness of death in the hut was broken by a child's shriek. Every one looked at Ramu's three year's old daughter, Ram Piari who was lying half naked on the bare floor. The child was hungry and had fever and cried desolately with the inconsolable grief of an orphan.

Just then a few labourers, who alongwith Ramu worked for the forest contractor came into the hut.

"Poor little brat" ! said one of them, "To lose both her parents in a single day. She has no relations who could look after her. What is going to become of her" ?

Said another, "God takes care of all poor orphans. He will not forget the little one."

"If Paro were to adopt her," said the first speaker, "the poor girl will get not only a mother and a father but also a grandfather".

"Grandfather ? What grandfather" ?

"The muslim *fakir*. Don't you know he is Paro's father ?"

"Not really ! Moreover he is a muslim."

"Yes, but a muslim of a different sort. Paro is his real daughter. Her name was Pari Banu. When the *fakir* became a disciple of Sant Nidhan Singh, he gladly gave his approval to his daughter's marriage to Dhanna Singh. Pari Banu became Paro. In this entire region there is none, who comes nearer to the ideal of a Sikh woman."

Some people from the neighbouring villages who had known Ramu also poured in. They were saying all the good things about the dead man. The women showered praises on Ramdevi.

"May I also die a similar death'" said one, "I should be gone before my husband is cremated. Holding the feet of her husband in reverence how she consciously left her body, happily and without suffering."

All the women were full of high praise for Paro who had brought great comfort to the couple. Both Ramu and his wife had suffered from tuberculosis. Heedless of infection, Paro had nursed them till the last day of their life. Her father, the muslim *fakir* had not lagged behind in keeping them provided with medicines and other necessities. Ramu and his wife had lived and died together. The saga of their love had few parallels.

VI

Both the dead bodies were placed on a single pyre and it was lighted. Nearby sat Sant Nidhan Singh, the renowned Seva Panthi saint, who preached and practiced the noble ideal of service to humanity. People came to him with ailing bodies or diseased souls and he healed them both alike. He was also a great orator and preached with remarkable eloquence the high ideals of the Seva Panthi Sect.

The burning pyre was now in full resplendence. The crackling flames cracked the bones wasted by long years of disease. People sat gathered under the shade of a big banyan tree, waiting to hear Sant Nidhan Singh speak. I was entranced by the serenely glowing eyes of the saint. Was this mysterious glow the effect of reflection from the burning pyre, I wondered. Or were his eyes aflame with an inner fire. I was still wondering when Sant Nidhan Singh began to speak. His discourse started with the following quotation from the Holy Granth:

ਇਛਸਿ ਜਮਾਦਿ ਪਰਾ ਭਯੰ
ਜਸੁ ਸ੍ਵਸਤਿ ਸੁਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਕ੍ਰਿਤੰ ॥

(ਗੂਜਰੀ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਜੈਦੇਵ, ਪੰਨਾ 526)

Then in a louder, more melodious and more resonant voice he repeated—

ਇਛਸਿ ਜਮਾਦਿ ਪਰਾ ਭਯੰ ਜਸੁ ਸ੍ਵਸਤਿ ਸੁਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਕ੍ਰਿਤੰ ॥
ਭਵਭੂਤ ਭਾਵ ਸਮਬ੍ਹਿਅੰ ਪਰਮੰ ਪ੍ਰਸੰਨ ਮਿਦੰ ॥

(ਗੁਜਰੀ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਜੈਦੇਵ, ਪੰਨਾ 526)

Rendering the text into simple language Sant Nidhan Singh explained :

"If a seeker should desire that Yama (Lord of Death) should be afraid to come near him, he should wear the armour of virtuous deeds. It is through good actions alone that human soul attains liberation to enter the realm of eternal bliss. A true man is he who dwells in righteousness among his fellow men, who works for his livelihood yet is never, for a single instant, forgetful of God. Most of you present here are workmen who earn your bread by the sweat of your brow. Working for an honest living is like worship. Hard work permeates the human soul with virtue. I belong to a sect that enjoins devout observance of some manual labour. The Sadhu may be a recluse but he should not be an idler. The ideal is that hand

and heart work harmoniously together. If the Sadhu knows no other trade or craft, at least he can weave ropes of paddy fibre. This is what, in fact, the Sadhus of the Seva Panthi sect do and thereby often invite the ridicule of the worldly wise. These latter obviously cannot see any merit in weaving coarse fibre ropes. The worldly wise, on the other hand delight in carrying falcons. Their fingers keep fiddling with the silken threads that tie the bird of prey to its perch on the hand. The worldly wise also ceaselessly indulge in the pleasure of chewing betel leaf. About such persons[8]

Kabir says :

ਹਾਥਿ ਤ ਡੋਰ ਮੁਖਿ ਖਾਇਓ ਤੰਬੋਰ ॥
ਮਰਤੀ ਬਾਰ ਕਸਿ ਬਾਧਿਓ ਚੋਰ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 326)

(Those who waste their lives fiddling with the falcon's silken threads or chewing betel leaf shall, at the time of death, be fastened with ropes like thieves)

For they have been no better than thieves. Their indulgence has been the thief of time. They have thus frittered away the precious human life. Our great ancestor Sant Seva Das used to say :

'Ever make the best of this brief span of life. Do not be doing nothing even for a moment. Even if God has given you riches, even if you have the means to fulfil all your worldly needs, do not let your hands remain idle. If there is nothing else to do, let your hands be busy weaving coarse fibre ropes. When Yama sees these thick ropes in your hands, he will flee in fear lest you should fasten him with these ropes and make him a prisoner. The silken threads can hold only a falcon. For putting Yama in bondage what you need is a coarse fibre rope :

ਹਾਥ ਮੇਂ ਰੱਸਾ ਚਿਤ ਅਨੁਰਾਗਾ ॥
ਦੇਖਤ ਹੀ ਜਮ ਜਾਵੈ ਭਾਗਾ ॥

(Yama flees in fear at the sight of those who carry a rope in their hands and the love of God in their hearts.)

The Sadhus who meditate and simultaneously work with their hands are holy men in the true sense. They are not the thieves of time. Nor do they do violence to time. The wastrels find it difficult to pass time; so they kill it, do violence to it and push it by taking all sorts of intoxicants and drugs.

Ramu was a toiler. Therefore he was a man of God in the true sense. Yama could not touch Ramu's soul. His soul has gone to the celestial regions and is enjoying ineffable bliss.

ਜਮ ਤੇ ਉਲਟਿ ਭਏ ਹੈ ਰਾਮ ॥
ਦੁਖ ਬਿਨਸੇ ਸੁਖ ਕੀਓ ਬਿਸਰਾਮ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 326)

His suffering is over and his soul has attained perennial peace. Sufferlng is a concomitant of the physical frame. Pain is inherent in the mortal body. For years Ramu's body had been eaten up by the dreadful disease. The body had become old and withered. Therefore Ramu renounced it and through death escaped into the deathless realm. Yes, Ramu discarded his diseased body like one discards an old and tattered shirt. So long as human body is unravaged by disease and decay it dutifully houses the human soul. Once the body is stricken with a mortal disease it is turned into a prisonhouse and the soul is glad to escape from it.

ਪਿੰਡਿ ਮੂਐ ਜੀਉ ਕਿਹ ਘਰਿ ਜਾਤਾ ॥
ਸਬਦਿ ਅਤੀਤਿ ਅਨਾਹਦਿ ਰਾਤਾ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 327)

(When the body dies where does the soul go ? A soul that has become unshackled in life through a living communion with God, attains, after death, an identity with the cosmic reality)

Says Kabir :

ਇਸੁ ਮਨ ਕਉ ਨਹੀ ਆਵਨ ਜਾਨਾ ।
ਜਿਸਕਾ ਭਰਮੁ ਗਇਆ ਤਿਨਿ ਸਾਚੁ ਪਛਾਨਾ ॥ 6 ॥
(ਰਾਗ ਗਉੜੀ ਗੁਆਰੇਰੀ ਅਸਟਪਦੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 330)

(If man be solely a body, its loss, indeed ends his identity. But man is essentially a soul, incorporeal and deathless. He who has realised this has realised the supreme truth.)

It is only the human body that feeds the flames of the funeral pyre. The human soul is man's bulwark against mortality. Death cannot vanquish it. On the other hand death takes it to the regions of fathomless peace.

For such a soul that gets immersed in the supreme consciousness, the cycle of birth and death is terminated. Such a soul becomes one with the timeless being. The whole universe is pervaded by only one immanent soul. It may manifest itself in countless bodies but the soul is essentially one.

ਇਸੁ ਮਨ ਕਾ ਕੋਈ ਜਾਨੈ ਭੇਉ ॥ ਇਹ ਮਨਿ ਲੀਣ ਭਏ ਸੁਖ ਦੇਉ ॥
(ਰਾਗ ਗਉੜੀ ਗੁਆਰੇਰੀ ਅਸਟਪਦੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 330)

ਜੀਉ ਏਕੁ ਅਰੁ ਸਗਲ ਸਰੀਰਾ ॥ ਇਸੁ ਮਨ ਕਉ ਰਵਿ ਰਹੇ ਕਬੀਰਾ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਗੁਆਰੇਰੀ ਅਸਟਪਦੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 330)

Because of physical bondage the soul becomes engrossed in manifold delusions and attachments :

ਕਉਨੁ ਕੋ ਪੂਤੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਕੋ ਕਾਕੋ ॥ ਕਉਨੁ ਮਰੈ ਕੋ ਦੇਇ ਸੰਤਾਪੋ ॥
ਕਉਨ ਕੋ ਪੁਰਖੁ ਕਉਨ ਕੀ ਨਾਰੀ ॥ ਇਆ ਤਤ ਲੇਹੁ ਸਰੀਰ ਬਿਚਾਰੀ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 331)

(All human relationships like that of father and son, husband and wife, with their attendant pangs of anguish and separation by death, are caused by body incarnations.)

Ramu and his wife Ramdevi were the same soul incarnate but by having separate bodies they were husband and wife. Ramdevi was a true *Satti*[9]. She was an epitome of truth. She was an embodiment of lifelong love and dedication. She nursed her husband with single-minded devotion and in the process caught the dreaded infection, But she did not relent in her efforts till her last breath. Her own body had been consumed by the disease. It had become weak and emaciated but through sheer will power, she kept it going so that she may continue to serve her husband. As I said, Ramdevi was a true *Satti* for her love for her husband was based on *Sat* (Truth). Unless a truthful and immutable love for the husband abides in a woman's heart, she cannot be a true *Satti*, even though she may suffer immolation in the funeral pyre of her husband.

Yet it was not Ramdevi who abandoned her body. It was the body that abandoned her. The body was tired and wanted rest. Ramdevi needed its services for the sake of the little child who had also contracted the father's disease. But the body refused to serve any more. It had become wasted into abject helplessness before the onslaughts of the malevolent and fatal disease. This tired wasted body could not rally from the shock of her husband's death. Ramdevi's mission in life has been left incomplete. It has to be completed by us. Realising the child's predicament, Paro has today agreed to adopt her and to look after her as her own. This morning the hapless child had become desolate on being left alone and forsaken in this wide world. Till today Paro was childless. Today she has been blessed with a sweet little darling. Yes, she is taking the child together with her terrible disease. A fountain of motherly love has today burst out from Paro's heart. A mother's love is essentially divine. It is mother's love that sustains the universe. Paro has to nourish in her heart that motherly love without which the child's life would soon become extinct. Paro has to clasp that child to her breast with that love which will make her feel that she and the child are one and the same body. Paro has to make that sacrifice. But it is not a sacrifice in the ordinary sense of the word. Any sacrifice that springs from love is spontaneous and effortless. It enriches the love all the more and permeates it with a divine glow deep to its very roots where one finds that love and sacrifice are two branches sprouting from the same root. But to reach such depths, you need a heart like that of Paro, which has the capacity to become ecstatic. And through her ecstasy of love, she can revive wilted hearts and blossom them like a lotus."

VII

What power had Sant Nidhan Singh's words! People listened to him spellbound. His words were tinged with the fragrance of roses. They were not meant merely for the ears. They permeated the whole atmosphere with honeyed sweetness. His melodious voice seemed to be sending out vibratory sensations into the brain and down the spinal chord. It was an entirely new experience for me to know that apart from their meaning and music words can also be invested with a fragrance. Sant Nidhan Singh's face was like that of a *rishi*[10]. as described in the ancient texts. Noble-headed, abundantly bearded, he always sat firmly upright, his quiet eyes fixed on Omnipresence. His discourse opened the doors of my soul, rusty and resistant with long disuse. I was awe-struck at the grandeur of his wisdom exquisitely blended with an innate humility. Like a placid flood his discourse swept away the mental debris of those present. Every word of his exposition was endowed with significance and efficacy and seemed to sprinkle rose water over the hearts lacerated with grief. To prepare rose water is a long and difficult process. Not only must the boiler be stocked with choicest roses but underneath logs must be kept burning to feed a constant fire. It seemed to me that the fuel Sant Nidhan Singh used was not coal, nor firewood but the evil deeds of those present, accumulated and carried over from past lives. Over this *Karmic* fire, apart from the boiler he had also placed a crucible in which he smelted the ore for minting a new destiny for an orphan child.

VIII

I spent a few days in that jungle. I felt as though all my past actions had been consumed, all my shackles snapped and all my delusions dispelled. I felt as though I had acquired a new garb and a new personality. The discourses of Sant Nidhan Singh, the company of the muslim *fakir* and the loving hospitality of Dhanna Singh and Paro transmuted my whole being with a rare alchemy.

On a bright and sunny afternoon we were all sitting together near the hillock facing the stream. It had rained in the morning and the air was clean and ambrosial. A pale stream of sunlight flowed over the hill. The shingle glittered brighter than ever. Unable to control my curiosity any longer I asked—

"Ever since I came here I have marvelled at this phenomenon. What is it that makes the stones on the hillock sparkle like diamonds and sapphires ?"

"This place," said Sant Nidhan Singh, "is associated with Moghul Khan. His life had been saved by Bhai Kannayya in the battlefield of Anandpur. As a token of his gratitude he came to pay homage to Bhai Kannayya and brought a precious ruby with him as an offering. Though it was only a ruby, Moghul Khan valued it as though it were the philosopher's stone. Ever since this precious stone had come into his possession his destiny had been transformed even as base metal is transmuted into gold by the touch of the philosopher's stone. He ascribed this miracle which had saved his life to this ruby which had always brought him good luck. This was his most precious possession and, therefore, he brought it as an offering to Bhai Kannayya. When he reached this bank of Sassua he found Bhai Kannayya entranced in a *Nirvikalpa Smadhi.*[11] The Seva Panthi texts describe this encounter in the following words :

He placed the ruby before the saint and stood reverently waiting. After a long time when the Saint broke his trance Moghul Khan paid his obeisance. The Saint affectionately enquired after his welfare and said :

'Why dost thou bring this stone to me ? Take it back, for what shall I do with it.'

Moghul Khan replied in all humility :

'Holy *Dervish*,[12] this is not a stone. This is a ruby.'

'Oh is it a ruby ?' said the Saint, 'Is it really ?'

So saying he threw it in midstream where the water ran deep. Seeing this Moghul Khan was astounded beyond measure. His astonishment soon gave way to anguish. He dared not reprove the saint. Mad with grief he took out his dagger and was about to cut his own throat.

'Thou has given it to me,' said the Saint softly, 'Then why dost thou grieve like this ?'

'Had thou kept it for thyself', said Moghul Khan broken heartedly, 'It would have made me happy. If thou need it not, give it back to me or I shall cut my throat here and now.'

The Saint did all he could to comfort him but Moghul Khan was inconsolable. Convulsed with grief he again put the dagger to his throat. Thereupon addressing the stream the Saint said :

'Sassua, give back that stone to me for Moghul Khan is wild with anguish.'

At this the stream parted itself in two branches and betwixt them a low hillock appeared. On this hillock lay scattered countless precious stones of bewildering variety and brilliance.

'Pick up thine stone', said the Saint, 'If thou can recognise it. Besides take as many others as thou wish'.

Moghul Khan's face was a study in amazement. His gloom disappeared and a light broke upon his countenance. This miracle aroused in him a profound faith in the Saint's omnipotence and identity with God. He prostrated himself before Bhai Kannayya. All his delusions were instantly banished. Folding his hands he said beseechingly—

'Holy Dervish, forgive my sins. I have greatly erred. I realised not that thou art a divine master'.

The Saint graciously smiled and blessed him. Moghul Khan gave away all his riches in charity and became a lifelong disciple of Bhai Kannayya. To this day a fair is held every year on the banks of Sassua to commemorate Moghul Khan's meeting with the Saint. The stream continues to flow in two branches around the hill."

(Sri Sant Rattan Mala pages 16–17)

Saying this Sant Nidhan Singh became quiet. After a while he spoke again :

"Moghul Khan's descendants were all enlightened *fakirs*. They tended towards mysticism but essentially they were all devout followers of Bhai Kannayya. The *Fakir* whom you see here is also a descendant of Moghul Khan. He has a good knowledge of Persian and Arabic texts. He is also an expert in the Greek system of medicine which he practices now only for the welfare of the poor and indigent. He was a householder till Moghul Khan appeared to him in a dream and gave him certain injunctions. This dream transformed his life. He became a recluse and made the jungle his abode. One day he wended his way towards this spot. As soon as he saw this low hillock he recollected his dream. Since then he has not moved away from this place. His grown up daughter Pari Bano followed him here. She is no longer Pari Bano but Paro."

Sant Nidhan Singh again lapsed into silence.

"But how is it," I asked, "that the stones over there still emit a dazzling radiance ?"

"It is all through the grace of Bhai Kannayya", replied Sant Nidhan Singh, "But think not too much about these stones. Far more precious jewels and pearls lie buried in the human consciousness. Listen to what Guru Nanak says.

ਮਤਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਰਤਨ ਜਵਾਹਰ ਮਾਣਿਕ, ਜੇ ਇਕ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸਿਖ ਸੁਣੀ ॥
(ਜਪੁਜੀ ਪੰਨਾ 2)

(Precious jewels, diamonds and pearls lie buried in the human consciousness. These are exposed and radiate light only when the disciple abides by the true Guru's injunctions—*Japji*).

Guru Nanak had come into this world to bring out these jewels and to endow them with a divine lustre. The great Guru told the Moghul emperor Babar not to pillage and plunder the poor hapless people in order to fill his treasures with rubies and emaralds. The Guru exhorted him to look inward instead and find hidden within, the peerless jewels of rarest refulgence. The Moghul emperor did not heed this exhortation but Moghul Khan did, when through Bhai Kannayya's grace, his delusions were banished. Bhai Kannayya's consciousness was a rich treasurehouse of gems of the rarest ray, for he had assimilated into his being the following teachings of Guru Nanak :

ਸਭਨਾ ਜੀਆ ਕਾ ਇਕੁ ਦਾਤਾ ਸੋ ਮੈ ਵਿਸਰਿ ਨਾ ਜਾਈ ॥
(ਜਪੁਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 2)

(May I never forget Him who is the sustainer of all living things—*Japji*.)

For him all men, even all living things, were the children of the same creator. This was no mere intellectual precept for him. It had become the very essence of his being and the mainspring of all his actions. As a man who had realized God he did not believe in ungodly sectarianism. Therefore in the battlefield he brought succour alike to the wounded of the Sikh garrison and the Moghul invading force."

IX

Saying this Sant Nidhan Singh again relapsed into silence. We could see that he was entering the meditative state. Treading softly we left him alone.

I made for the hut. Inside I saw Paro with Ram Pyari's head on her lap. She was stroking the child's forehead with angelic tenderness and uttering words of endearment—

"Whose little darling are you ?" asked Paro.
"Paro's !"
"Whose little moon are you ?"
"Paro's !"
"Whose lovely star are you ?"
"Paro's !"
"Whose bright sun are you ?"
"Paro's !'?

To two thousand questions that Paro put there was the same monosyllabic reply. What heavenly joy did this repetitive answer bring to Paro ? I could see that Paro's serenely glowing face was now flushed with emotion. So uniquely and exclusively had she won the little heart that I became jealous of Paro. Then suddenly it dawned upon me that Paro had to pay a heavy price for this love. Who else could pay such a price ? Yes, the muslim *Fakir* could and so could Sant Nidhan Singh, but no one else.

Paro's kisses had acted as a remedial pill for tuberculosis. Her selfless love had performed a miracle and overwhelmed the disease. Her caresses had wrought a transformation, had changed the pale, sickly face and suffused it with health and cheer. She had saved the trembling chick from the prowling death by sheltering it under her own wings. Who else could do it ? Certainly not I. I had, therefore, no reason to feet jealous of Paro.

Moving away from the hut I climbed up the *machan*. A cool breeze was blowing. The hillock glittered with its usual brightness. Sant Nidhan Singh sat motionless in a deep ecstatic trance.

X

Next morning Sant Nidhan Singh resumed his discourse saying :

"Bhai Kannayya was a transcendental *Yogi.*[13] Through deep meditation he could escape from his bodily prison and resume his true identity as a spirit. On the banks of Sassua for days together he would remain in '*Nirvikalpa Samadhi*' a state of ecstatic union with the Creator. He knew that the breath of the human body also flows in two channels. All practising *yogis* are familiar with these two breath channels. This provides them the ability to enter at will the breathless state for the attainment of immutable bliss. A reference to these two channels has also been made in the holy Granth. Besides these two a third channel has also been mentioned.

ਇੜਾ ਪਿੰਗੁਲਾ ਅਉਰ ਸੁਖਮਨਾ ਤੀਨਿ ਬਸਹਿ ਇਕ ਠਾਈ ।
(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਬੇਣੀ ਜੀਉ ਕੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 974)

Ira takes off from the left nostril and moving along the spine reaches the brain. The *yogis* practice breath control through *Ira*. *Pingla* is on the right side and *Sukhmana* in the middle. The tantric texts give a detailed account of the breathing technique and its channels.

For those who do not practice Hath Yogic exercise, a much simpler alternative is available. They can sail smoothly along the placid river of Truth. This river also splits itself in two channels. One is called Love and the other is known as Service to Humanity. We could as well call "Service to Humanity" as *Ira* and Love as *Pingla*. As you know in Punjabi the word '*Pingla*' has another meaning. This is the word used for a cripple. So that we can say that Love without 'Service to

Humanity' is like a cripple, mutilated and maimed. Love divorced from service cannot go very far. It is only by combining love and 'Service to Humanity' that one can tread the path of Truth. It is only through harmonious balance of love and service to humanity that the seeker attains perfect bliss. The repository of this bliss is *Sukhmana*.

ਪੂਰੇ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸਾਚੀ ਬਾਣੀ ॥ ਸੁਖਮਨ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਸਹਜਿ ਸਮਾਣੀ ॥
(ਧਨਾਸਰੀ ਮ: 3, ਪੰਨਾ 663)

(The true words of the divine master have transported my mind to the quiescent state of Sukhmana).

Through *Ira* and *Pingla* the stream of breath ceaselessly flows. But in the middle one i.e. *Sukhmana* there is no motion for there dwells perfect tranquility and repose. *Sukhmana* is like the low hillock between the two branches of Sassua and this low hillock is symbolic of the awakened human consciousness where jewels and rubies radiate light :

ਮਤਿ ਵਿਚਿ ਰਤਨ ਜਵਾਹਰ ਮਾਣਿਕ ॥
(ਜਪੁਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 2)

Bhai Kannayya was a true *yogi*. His consciousness reposed in Sukhmana. Those who reach this stage have alchemy in their gaze. It was this alchemy that transmuted Moghul Khan's personality. It was this gaze which cut the shackles off his feet and freed the captive from the bondage of ego. He had given the ruby as an offering to the saint, but the ruby remained tied to his ego by a silken thread which he could not snap. He continued to worship the precious stone of which he had made an offering. This turned the offering into a shallow, worthless ritual.

ਕਰਮ ਕਰਤ ਬਧੇ ਅਹੰਮੇਵ ॥ ਮਿਲਿ ਪਾਥਰੁ ਕੀ ਕਰਹੀ ਸੇਵ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 324)

(If an offering remains tied to the ego, it is like worshiping the thing offered and not the deity to whom it is offered.)

The gaze of Bhai Kannayya possessed the qualities of a philosopher's stone. When his gaze fell upon the stones strewed across the stream they started glittering like jewels. This was the miracle that caused the transformation of Moghul Khan. His gaze also developed the same quality. He remained transfixed there watching the alchemy of this miracle.

This is the inner alchemy of the mind which cannot be attained through the study of books alone. Philosophy by itself is unable to reveal God. When your mind gets a flashing glimpse, it is apt to slip away. You can not grasp it. You can capture it only if you transform the formless glimpse by giving it a positive shape through *Karma* (action). This is the technique of changing the ethereal into a positive substance, something which can be held and sustained. For instance, a person with a single leg is unable to walk. It is only when there is the other leg to support him that he can take a step, without faltering or stumbling. Universal love and service also act and react in a similar fashion. Without service love is incomplete. Service enables love to reach its goal. *Samadhi* or meditation by itself is like a person with a single leg. Service provides the second leg. Without service, *Samadhi* is weak or incomplete. It is fulfilled only when it is accompanied by service to make it firm and unshakable.

There was Bhai Bhalla Ram, a renowned Saint, who was always seen engrossed in religious discourses and divine musical recitations *(Kirtan)*. He was a powerful personality and his presence always radiated ineffable joy. The listeners sat spell bound, while their hands were kept busy in tasks like twining the flax into ropes, stitching clothes and so on.

The meditation of the Formless God is an intriguing phenomenon. The visions that we sometimes see momentarily cannot be sustained. But if the hands were busy in rendering service the visions would soon take a firm root. Almost like gathering water passing through a sieve into a bucket."

XI

The next day the discussion started again. I asked whether there was a school of thought which considered action *(Karma)* as a bondage and believed that without *Gyan* (enlightenment) there is no Mukti (deliverance) ? Sant Nidhan Singh confirmed that it was so but with a subtle difference. Bhagat Ravi Das says :

ਫਲ ਕਾਰਨ ਫੂਲੀ ਬਨ ਰਾਇ ॥ ਫਲੁ ਲਾਗਾ ਤਬ ਫੂਲੁ ਬਿਲਾਇ ॥
ਗਿਆਨੈ ਕਾਰਨ ਕਰਮ ਅਭਿਆਸੁ ॥ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਭਇਆ ਤਹ ਕਰਮਹ ਨਾਸੁ ॥
(ਭੈਰਉ ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਜੀ, ਪੰਨਾ 1167)

Bhagat Ravi Das is giving a beautiful illustration. If you tear away the leaves of the tree there would be no flowers, and witout flowers there would be no fruit. It is the flower that turns into fruit. Fruit is only another form of flower. Likewise *Karam* is converted into *Gyan*. If you destroy *Karam* there would be no awakening or *Gyan*. Bhagat Ravi Das is explaining the fine relationship between *Karam* and *Gyan* by giving the allegory of fruit and flowers. Without seeds there can be no vegetation, but the seeds themselves spring from the flowers. It is the *Karma* that brings about *Gyan*. *Karma* or service is like flowers and *Gyan* is fruit. Just as there is no fruit without flowers, *Gyan* cannot be attained without service. Guru Nanak says :

ਜੇਤੇ ਜੀਅ ਤੇਤੇ ਸਭਿ ਤੇਰੇ ਵਿਣੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਫਲੁ ਕਿਸੈ ਨਾਹੀ ॥"
(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 354)

(All creation is Thy handiwork
But without service there is no fruitfulness).

XII

How many days did I spend in the jungle ? I do not know. I had lost all sense of time. Sant Nidhan Singh's discourses had acted like nectar. His words had awakened me from the deathly trance of ignorance to an understanding of eternal life. Listening to him had been an enthralling experience. The environment had cast an inexorable spell over my spirit. A vibrant joy seemed to pervade in the atmosphere. My eyes feasted exultingly on the pine covered mountains against the sunny blue skies. One day speaking with unusual gravity Sant Nidhan Singh said :

"My son, it is time now for you to return home".

These simple words had the effect of an earthquake. All my chimerical plans to make the jungle my permanent abode were razed to the ground. Though my heart was unwilling, I could not defy this injunction.

It is difficult to describe how I took leave of the place which had been a haven of bliss for me. Only a poet could find words to express the ebb and flow of my emotions. With a child's intuition, Ram Pyari sensed my departure and started crying bitterly. To my amazement she threw her lean arms around my neck and her little fingers clung to me like the tendrils of ivy.

When I reached Rishikesh I came across a newspaper vendor shouting excitedly—

"Sansar Samachar"![14] Read the latest sensational news. Sansar Samachar ! Sansar Samachar !"

I purchased a copy and started turning the pages. What should I find on the third page of the newspaper but my own photograph with the following description.

"My son in the prime of his youth, well versed in English and Persian, of wheatish complexion, no scar or mole on the face, height five feet five and a half inches, wearing golden framed glasses, is missing for the last ten days. Anyone finding him will be handsomely rewarded.

Dear Manoraj, should you happen to read this, reach home at once. All your wishes will be gladly fulfilled and no questions asked. Your mother's condition is serious. She has refused to touch food for the last six days. Rush back if you want to see her before she dies."

I do not know what effect these news had on my mind. It appeared as if the earth was slipping from under my feet. I felt guilty and restless. While I tried to calm myself I saw a tonga rushing past me. The horse's hoof tripped on the newly tarred road and it fell down. The back seat of the tonga along with the passengers was hitched high in the air and the horse was puffing and panting helplessly. I ran to help, I cut off the leather straps and helped the animal get back on its legs. The speed and resourcefulness with which I acted saved the life of the poor dumb creature. This mission of mercy somehow stopped the tumult within me and inexplicably I regained my cheerfulness and composure. As I helped the coachman pull down the back seat, I caught sight of my uncle and aunt sitting there.

"You here ?" shouted my aunt frantically, "You heartless, good for nothing wretch. For the last ten days we have been torn by anxiety. Do you know we have ransacked the whole world looking for you. Do you know how much agony you have caused to the whole family. Your mother is on her death bed and you are out on your pleasure jaunts."

Excitedly she clambered down from the tonga and firmly caught hold of my left arm. Her hands were shaking with wrath and the contact made my arm quiver, My uncle gently clasped my right arm. His hands did not shake , At his touch a comforting sensation seemed to pulsate through my veins.

"My son ! My dear son !' said he with tender solicitude, "God be praised that we have found you alive and well".

I was silent and composed. My mind was in a state of unassailable repose. For a moment it seemed to me as though my aunt on my left and my uncle on my right were *Ira* and *Pingla* and between them I was in the blissful state of *Sukhmana*. Silently I paid my obeisance to Sant Nidhan Singh.

XIII

For a whole year I did not stir out of my house. My family members were vigilant. I did not want to cause them any further mental torture. When my trustworthiness was restored I sought permission to go out for a few days. Impulsively my impatient steps took me to the road from Rishikesh to Hardwar. When I reached the bridge on Sassua, I started moving along the right bank. I walked a long distance but could not find either the thatched hut or the low hillock in midstream. I was amazed and stupified. I dragged my feet back to the bridge. There I met a wizened old man.

"A muslim *fakir* used to live nearby ?" I asked.

"Yes he did !" replied he.

"Paro and Dhanna Singh also ! There was a thatched hut."

"Yes, there was."

"Where is it now ? Where are they ? Where is Sant Nidhan Singh ?"

"Don't you know ?" said the old man, "the floods that ravaged these parts in the last rainy season. Both Sassua and the Ganges were in spate. The flood water reached the Bhim Goda bazar. Even the roof tops were under water. Paro and Dhanna Singh tied together logs and made them into two rafts for rescue work. One raft was operated by Paro and Dhanna Singh and the other by Sant Nidhan Singh and the muslim *fakir*. They saved many persons from the wrath of Sassua. In one of the trips the rafts were carried away by the swift current into the swirling waters of the Ganges. Both the rafts overturned in midstream. Since then the scene here has been completely changed. Even the low hillock, where the shingle glittered like rubies, has disappeared."

I covered my ears with my hands and uttered a loud shriek. The sound of my shriek reverberated in the distant hills.

The old man looked at me with compassion and his weak and withered hand stroked my back.

In a voice choked with emotion I asked, "Did any one survive ?"

"None," he replied, except perhaps a little girl whom Paro had tied to a wooden plank. Some one told me that providentially the plank drifted to the bank of the Ganges and the child was rescued."

"She must be Ram Payari," I said wiping tears from my face. "But where can I find her. Oh ! where can she be ? What shall I do now ? Should I put in the following advertisement in 'Sansar Samachar' ?

"Missing—a three years old girl. Her name is Ram Pyari. She was rescued by someone last year from the terrible flood in the Ganges. She was no ordinary girl. She was a ruby, a philosopher's stone. More than that she was Paro's little darling, her little moon, her lovely star and her bright sun. Any one finding her will be suitably rewarded."

XIV

Thirty three years have passed since all this happened. I have not found Ram Pyari. Nor do I know how the world has treated her. Perhaps she is living as a poor miserable woman in a slum or it may be that she is reigning as a queen in some distant fairyland. Some day this narrative in my autobiography may be serialized in a journal or even published as a book. It may so happen that Ram Pyari may read it herself or someone may read it out to her. Possibly it may afford her a hazy glimpse of her remote childhood and evoke vague recollection of me. Possibly it may produce in her heart a distant echo of the following lullaby with which Paro used to put her to sleep :

ਵਿਚਿ ਦੁਨੀਆ ਸੇਵ ਕਮਾਈਐ ॥
ਤਾ ਦਰਗਹ ਬੈਸਣੁ ਪਾਈਐ ॥

(ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗ ਮ. 1 ਪੰਨਾ 26)

(Those who serve humanity in this world get a place of honour in the next).

REFERENCES

1. A Sect of ascetics founded by Baba Sri Chand, the elder son of Guru Nanak.
2. Hindu philosophy founded on the Vedas.
3. A darling son of the guru. Guru Gobind Singh declared that his Sikhs (disciples) were dearer to him than his own sons.
4. Early morning meal with which the Muslims begin their fast in the month of Ramadan.
5. Ninth month of Mohammedan year, during which rigid fasting is observed, throughout the daylight of all the days of that month.
6. A nutritious food prepared by pounding tender barley.
7. An anchorite, one who pursues a *Sadhana* or path of spiritual discipline.

8. Kabir was a great sixteenth century saint whose large following included both Hindus and Muslims.
9. A Hindu woman who immolates herself on the funeral pyre of her husband.
10. The Rishis, literally 'Seers' were the authors of the Vedas in an indeterminable antiquity.
11. A blissful super conscious state in which a saint perceives the identity of his soul with the Cosmic Spirit.
12. An appellation normally used for a Mohammedan fakir, vowed to poverty and austerity.
13. A practitioner of yoga, the ancient Indian science of meditation on God.
14. World News.

POWER BORN OF AN IDEAL

[ਆਦੱਰਸ਼ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਕਤੀ]

Recently a small pamphlet in Arabic was published by a minister of the Sultan of Muscat. A resume of this pamphlet is given delow :

An Egyptian hiking in mountaneous regions came upon a deep cave. The cave looked dreadful and forbidding but the Egyptian took courage and peeped inside. Scanning the semi-dark interior, the Egyptian saw a man sleeping on the rugged floor. He took fright and would have certainly run away but curiosity held him back. He went into the cave and found that the sleeper was an old soldier. The dress he wore was of an outmoded cut and a rusted sword of antique design lay beside him. The sight astonished the Egyptian. Just then the soldier turned in his sleep and opened his eyes. For a while he gazed in bewilderment at the vaulted domelike ceiling of the cave. Then as he caught sight of the Egyptian he exclaimed :

"Cursed am I ! I awake from slumber and the first thing my eyes rest on is a damned infidel !"

Egyptian : I am not a damned infidel. I am a Muslim. As a matter of fact all Egyptians are Muslims.

Soldier : Is that so ! I am so glad. It seems I have slept for a very long time.

Egyptian : Who are you ?

Soldier : I am a soldier of King Qasim's army which invaded Egypt and fought the Egyptian infidels. Egypt was at that time a country of non-believers. I straggled from the main force and entered this cave to rest for a while.

Hearing this the Egyptian was totally flabbergasted.

Centuries had passed since Qasim lived and Egypt had been conquered by Arab invaders.

When at last the Egyptian and the old soldier emerged from the cave, the latter was amazed to see that what had once been a vast desert was covered with dome shaped buildings. He turned to his companion and enquired. "What are these monsters ?"

"These are the tombs of important people," the Egyptian replied.

Just then great tumult was heard. Turning their heads they saw a troupe of singers and dancers performing in the courtyard of a king's tomb.

Soldier : What sacrilege ! Song and dance at the mausoleum of a Muslim king ! It is just impossible. You are a liar. Egypt has not yet turned to Islam.

Egyptian : I am speaking the truth. Egypt is now an Islamic country.

As the two advanced further they came upon a huge circular tomb where oil lamps were burning in a semi circle. This sight also startled the old soldier. Lighting lamps at tombs amounted to worship of graves and was un-Islamic. Such practices were indulged in by infidels. Still the man swore that Egypt was an Islamic country.

They went ahead and heard a great din. A festival was being held in commemoration of the death anniversary of the famous Sheikh Badoi. The tomb of the Sheikh was the scene of great rejoicing. Music was being played and people were drinking wine. Seeing this the old soldier flew into a temper :

"If this is Islam", shouted he, "It is worse than idolatry. I cannot bear to see this spectacle. I have seen Islam in its pristine glory. You say these people are Muslims. To me they seem damned infidels".

The old soldier's face was crimson with rage. His voice rose in a fevered pitch as he shouted :

"I am a Muslim. My religion ordains me to fight evil with might or lacking might with persuasion. If both these fail, my religion enjoins me to shun evil. I am a soldier and can use might. Though my sword is rusty, I......I......"

Saying this, he unsheathed his sword and fell upon the band of revellers. People ran away in great confusion. The police arrived and the old soldier was put behind the bars. When he was brought before the judges, he told them that he was a soldier of King Qasim's army. The judges laughed at him and thinking him to be of insane mind, acquitted him.

His Egyptian friend took the old soldier to his house. When the hour for the afternoon Namaz arrived, the old soldier turned his face to the west and went down on his knees. The Egyptian kept observing him with great interest. He wanted to see in what manner Namaz was performed in King Qasim's time.

The Egyptian saw that while saying his prayers the soldier was so absorbed that he seemed to be totally oblivious of his environments. When the Namaz came to an end, the soldier was startled by the sound of loud wailing. He saw a concourse of women beating their breasts and crying most piteously. The pathetic sight moved him to tears. He enquired from the Egyptian the cause of all this lamentation. The Egyptian informed him that this was the funeral of a Turkish official and the wailing women were hired mourners. This revelation came as a stunning blow to the old soldier. He again knelt down and started praying.

"O God ! O Allah of the believers, for what sins have thou kept me alive in this land of infidels. I have been punished enough. O sustainer of the world have mercy on me and take me back under your protection."

Just then a thick mist arose into which the old soldier vanished.

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The author of the pamphlet did not make it clear whether this story was based on fact or was a mere figment of the Egyptian's imagination. Most probably it was only a concoction of the author's brain to stress the degradation in contemporary Islam. Undoubtedly, the story voices the woeful lament that arose from the author's anguished heart like a whiff of smoke in the desert air.

Be that as it may, the story aptly symbolizes a great truth. This truth no longer remains confined to the context of Islam, but assumes a general character. It becomes universal. The conclusion drawn is pertinent to any religion, sect or institution.

Whither is flown the glory that Guru Gobind Singh gave to the Khalsa ? Where is the power that gleamed in our souls like a flash of lightning ? Where is that spirit of sacrifice that had suffused all faces with a heavenly radiance ? Where is the rare gleam with which the sharp edges of the double-edged sword had been invested by the warrior Guru ? Where is the steel that had entered the soul ? Where are those gold-tipped arrows which killed not only the aggressor but also his sins and accompanied his soul like a luminous passport to heaven ?

Whither has that glorious epoch fled ? Where is the high noon of our prime. It is amazing that so soon it should have mingled with the dark shades of the evening. Is there any vestige of that splendour ? Do we see any light among the ruins ? Are there embers left in this heap of ashes ? Is it possible to produce a spark and revive the crimson dawn ?

Nothing lasts for long in this mortal world. The disconsolate heart draws some comfort from this thought. However human mind does not easily reconcile itself to the death of certain precious ideals. One such ideal is the ideal of love. Love is said to be immortal and immutable. We wish it were so. Experience shows that love is also changing and waxes and wanes like the moon. It breaks, is shattered to pieces and then tries to bring those pieces together. It seems that love is like the gleam of a falling meteor. No gleam is produced until the meteor falls and once it falls the gleam is soon extinguished.

Can love be made immortal ? Can it be transmuted into a more permanent force ? Can it be charged into a perennial torrent of light ? Yes, provided it undergoes a transformation. Love that sheds its possessiveness, love that ceases to be a feverish burning passion, acquires a supreme quality. It is such-love that can perform miracles. It is such love which gives to the human spirit eagle-like wings and the freedom of the skies.

Thus is love converted into force and energy. What is energy ? It is difficult to define it. There has been no greater misuse of anything in this world than of energy and power. Power has many forms and is of many types. The crudest form of power is that produced by machines which is called mechanical power.

Superior to the mechanical power is the power produced by human body like the power of a warrior's arm. Even more potent than the physical power is the mental energy born of human mind. Both mechanical and physical powers are blind. Though mental energy has been endowed with eyes, it has yet to acquire vision. Thus it can, by lighting up the lamp within, gain enlightenment. Till then a chance flash of lightning in the sky may enable it to get a momentary glimpse of the universe. Superior even to the mental energy is the power of the human spirit. The spiritual power, in essence, is akin to the divine spark in human soul.

Different kinds of power held sway in different epochs. In Satyayuga (the epoch of Truth), spiritual power was predominant. In the Treta epoch, mental energy was the main controlling force. The Dwapar epoch was characterised by the pre-eminence of physical power. Kaliyuga is the age of mechanical power.

Humanity can attain perfection by a balanced and harmonious development of all types of energy. Any lopsided progress can be suicidal. Development of mechanical power alone has armed the human race with lethal weapons of self-destruction. If the armament race is allowed to go unchecked, it can lead to another world war. Whenever blind mechanical power, or for that matter blind physical power, is let loose in the world it can only lead to a blood bath.

Mental energy, unless guided by an inner light usually degenerates into a force of darkness. Occult powers acquired through concentration of mind can often lead the seeker away from his destination into the perilous quagmires which engulf his soul and in which his occult powers also ultimately perish.

Through scientific advancement, mechanical power has produced electricity to light up our homes and streets but it has led the human mind into dark bye-lanes. Similarly mental energy, lacking spiritual vision has achieved nothing. It has only groped in darkness and led to perdition.

Due to the destruction and misery caused in the world by the use of physical and mechanical power the common man acquired a distaste for power. Moral people began to condemn power and shy away from it. This produced harmful results. In religion it bred the cult of non-violence. Men of piety became weaklings. For them Dharma only meant a total rejection of power and a complete aversion to the use of force. No wonder the philosophy of non-violence in India led to decadence and political subservience. Even when the hold of non-violence on the Indian mind was loosened, it did not truly imbibe power. It merely created Kali the goddess of power and people began to worship her.

Sitting in a dark cave, a devotee may spend his whole life worshipping the sun. Such worship is of no avail. He would have fared far better, if instead he had come out in the sunshine and allowed it to warm his body in winter. In the same manner worshipping Shakti, the goddess of power, is quite different from imbibing power and letting it seep into one's spirit.

The dawn of spiritual power brings about a great transformation in human soul. It enables the person concerned to face a catastrophe with great equanimity. As a matter of fact for such persons the distinction between pleasure and pain, happiness and misery is erased. Not that such persons do not have to face hardships and adversities in life. They have their due share; but their brave spirit enables them to face and overcome a crisis with courage and fortitude. Hardships season their spirit even as timber is seasoned by exposure to inclemency of weather. Heroic spirits drawing sustenance from adversities grow in stature until they attain heights of glory and greatness.

A truly brave person stops making distinction between happiness and misery. When power vibrates in his being his measures and yardsticks undergo a change. The only distinction that his soul recognizes is that between good and evil. While embarking upon a course of action, he uses only this touchstone and is least bothered whether this course will bring him happiness or pain.

All efforts to acquire mental energy are directed at concentration of mind. Concentration of mind is not an easy thing. Difficult Hath Yogic exercises, quaint outlandish rituals and pranayam (breath control) are resorted to with a view to attain this objective. Concentration of human mind is like breaking a wild stallion. The yogi makes painful and tortuous efforts. Holding the reins tight, he wants to keep the unbroken steed in one position. The wild creature strains at the bridle, kicks up its hind legs in the air and neighs defiantly. When it breaks away it runs wildly in all directions. To bring his mind under control the yogi uses all the methods and difficult expositions of 'Hath Yoga Pradipka' and 'Gorakh Saintha'.

Perhaps a better way to break the wild steed is to let it run whither it will. After it has had its fill of running, it will come back exhausted and perspiring. That is the time to give it a pat on the back or a tender caress on the forehead. That is the time to fasten the saddle and leap on its back. It will kick up no more. Thus can the human mind be harnessed for spiritual discipline. This method of controlling the mind is called 'Sehj Yoga'.

The important thing for a seeker to bear in mind is that the efforts made to attain concentration should not violate natural human instincts, impulses and desires. Such efforts have little chance of success if they run counter to human nature. Only efforts that harmonise with human nature can produce lasting results. Otherwise human mind is turned into a field where a fierce battle rages perpetually between human instincts and efforts to subdue them. No concentration and peace is possible amidst the din of a battle.

Peace reigns only in a quiet mind. A mind that attains perfect concentration has immense energy potential. This potential can be acquired not through yogic practices alone. It is more easily gained through the contemplation of an ideal. Lofty ideals irresistibly draw heroic souls and arouse their latent potential to a miraculous degree. When the sun rises, the lotus flower is pontaneously charged with life and blossoms in its full glory. When the full moon appears in the heavens, it draws toward itself the mighty waves of the ocean, thereby demonstrating the power born of an ideal. Sikhism enjoins on its votaries to aspire for such power only.

Power cannot be generated in the human spirit through repetition of mantras, through empty and soulless ritual or through difficult yogic postures. This objective can be achieved only by filling man's soul with a great ideal. Through the alchemy of a great ideal, spineless cowards get transformed into indomitable heroes. Through the inspiration provided by a great idea, supine spirits attain sublime heights.

Has Sikhism fallen from the pinnacles of past glory ? Is it heading for an abyss ? I do not think so. My optimism is justified inter-alia by the memories of the recent Akali movement for Gurdwara Reform. What heroism, what unflinching courage, what dedication was brought out by this movement which stirred the Sikh community to its innermost depths. Here was a great cause dear to the Sikh people. The entire community plunged into the foray in utter disregard of personal danger, laughing death to scorn, which proves my thesis that when a people, whose spirit lies dormant, are presented a great ideal, an ocean of strength starts surging in their soul; the blood courses singing in their veins and the wilting flower of past glory gets revived once again.

The Akali Gurdwara Reform Movement added a glorious chapter to the history of India. As a matter of fact this movement was a precursor of the Indian Freedom Movement. It also bore testimony, if any was needed, to the fact that the spirit with which Guru Gobind Singh fired the hearts of his disciples, is dauntless and undying. It proved that the Ideals of Sikhism are charged with great power potential which can pull the community out of the morass of apathy and decadence.

The Guru's fire still smoulders in the hearts of the Sikhs. They should never forget that for the first time power of an ideal has been demonstrated in all its glory in the world history by the Sikh martyrs and heroes. The power born of an ideal is unparalleled in its range and intensity. This power is different from that defined as Umma in Kane Upanishad and idolized and worshipped as Chandi in the Puranas. This power is created only at the high tide in the ocean of dedication and sacrifice.The power born of an ideal is not that which the Shaivites worship in the form of Parvati (Lord Shiva's consort). This power is also not goddess Jagdamba, the giver of all boons. It is also quite distinct from that embodied by the goddess Lakshmi of the Madhva sect which forms a trinity with goddess Bhawani and Durga. The power born of an ideal is created by upheavals in a nation's life, upheavals that throw up new ideals. A new brotherhood comes into being fired by high idealism and knitted together by a common purpose, ready to face utmost persecution for the preservation of their glorious identity.

The Sikh ideals and the Sikh way of life have been dearly cherished by the community. Every devout Sikh regards himself as a sentinel for safeguarding the Sikh traditions and ideas. It is these traditions which, two and a half centuries ago provided a panacea for the ills of the Indian society. It is these ideals that militated against the rigid caste system that for centuries had bedevilled the nation's life. These ideals also inspired a downtrodden people to stand up and throw off the oppressor's yoke.

The glorious ideals of Sikhism are eternal and immutable. There may be a temporary eclipse but every crisis in the life of the community is bound to be followed by a renaissance and revival. Politically motivated, Sikh leaders may indulge in squabbles but these should not lead us to despair about the future of the community. At times the Sikh spirit may appear to be dormant but this should not prompt us to pay heed to the prophets of doom.

Nietzsche, the famous German philosopher had propagated power as an ideal in itself. Such power is entirely different from the power born of an ideal. For Nietzsche power, no matter what its source, was of primary importance. Sikh philosophy, on the other hand, gives precedence to ideal as the mainspring of power. When power becomes an ideal, degeneration and decadence set in. On the other hand when power flows from an ideal, it ushers an era of great deeds. Power as an ideal in itself turns men into megalomaniacs and gives rise to dictatorship. On the contrary when ideal becomes the mainspring of power, man's ego is destroyed, the rusty shackles of self interest and self preservation are snapped, steel enters the soul and the human spirit gleams forth as a double edged sword. At that state men consider it a great privilege to be able to sacrifice their all for the sake of an ideal.

What does the double edged sword, the Khanda of Guru Gobind Singh symbolise. Khanda is the confluence of two sharp edges at a common hilt. One edge is the luminous symbol of spiritual enlightenment, the other of power born of an ideal. Khanda is the emblem of that high Sikh ideal in which power is tempered by spiritual enlightenment while the latter is perpetuated by power. The coalition of power and spiritual enlightenment is the Khalsa ideal.

In Guru Hargobind's time Sikhism adopted two swords, the sword of spirituality and the sword of temporal authority. The former was emblematic of spiritual enlightenment, the latter of power. Only a great prophet and hero can successfully wield these two swords together. The fusion of spiritual enlightenment and temporal authority was a lofty ideal. It was, however, difficult for the common people to understand sword as a symbol of spiritual enlightenment. The adoption of two swords by the sixth Master, therefore, caused much trepidation and misapprehension among many of his followers who thought that temporal authority was not in keeping with the spirit of Guru Nanak's teachings. The Guru and his enlightened disciples had to make efforts to dispel these delusions and to restore faith among common people. .

ਜੇ ਗੁਰ ਸਾਂਗ ਵਰੱਤਦਾ ਸਿਖ ਸਿਦਕ ਨ ਹਾਰੇ,

(ਭਾਈ ਗੁਰਦਾਸ ਜੀ)

(Even if the Guru appears in a different garb : it is incumbent on the disciple not to waver in his faith).

Those who found it difficult to reconcile themselves to the idea of two swords did not know that this duality was only a temporary phenomenon. This was only the beginning, the foundation of a new and lofty concept. Before long the two swords were to be amalgamated into the double-edged sword (*Khanda*) of Guru Gobind Singh. Before long the two emblems were to merge together into a unique symbol of the Khalsa ideal in the hands of the Tenth Master.

PRAYER

[ਪ੍ਰਾਰਥਨਾ]

Prayer is the mainstay of human life. There are numerous occasions in the life of every man, no matter how proud and powerful, when he has to seek refuge in prayer. Socrates is regarded as the wisests philosopher that ever lived. Death had no fear for him. When his enemies offered to him the cup of hemlock (poison), he drained it as cheerfully as though it were nectar. Even such a man believed in the efficacy of prayer. He had once written :

> O, beloved Pan and all ye other gods of this place, grant to me that I be made beautiful in my soul within, and that all external possessions be in harmony with my inner man.
>
> (Phaedrus)

In Sikh philosophy and way of life, prayer holds a special significance. Sikhism regards prayer as an adequate substitute for all rituals and other efforts for gaining spiritual merit. For a Sikh, prayer is a must for sanctifying all events in his social and corporate life, such as birth, death, marriage and even battle. No ceremony is deemed complete unless it is accompanied by prayer.

The Khalsa Tract Society was founded in 1893 A.D., as a result of the efforts made by Bhai Sahib Bhai Vir Singh. The very first tract published by the Society had prayer for its theme. Among other things this tract emphasized the need for prayer while launching any scheme or project in life. The foundation of the Khalsa Tract Society itself was laid with a prayer.

In this age of reason, the educated youth ask whether prayer is ever answered. Perhaps it is. It is, however, not necessary that prayer must be answered. Says Oscar Wilde :

> "Prayer must never be answered. If it is, it ceases to be prayer and becomes a correspondence."

Prayer is a duty which must be performed without expectation of any response. The Sikh prayer, even though it may be for personal favours, transcends self and becomes a prayer on behalf of humanity itself, seeking the hapiness and welfare of one and all. A Sikh's prayer is acceptable only if it rises above the petty needs at a personal level and gets absorbed in the good and well being of mankind. This feeling of oneness with all is a reward in itself filling the seeker's mind with ineffable peace and compassion.

For a Sikh, prayer is the means of surging in ever buoyant hope (Chardi Kala). For him it is an automatic effort. By making common cause with the entire humanity we get rid of our selfish pettiness, our uselessness, meanness, narrow mindedness and parochialism. We shed these off just as on growing older we discard our old unfitting clothes. This is what Chardi Kala means, which you gain immediately on praying for the well being of all. The uplifting of the human soul from the shackles of material existence and absorption in the cosmic consciousness of all creation, is what Chardi Kala implies. The attainment of this state is the miracle of the Sikh prayer:

For our guidance, an excerpt from the tract entitled 'Prayer' written by Bhai Sahib Bhai Vir Singh in 1893 is reproduced below :—A study of this tract is very rewarding. It disabuses the minds of those who reckon prayer as a useless exercise :

An interesting anecdote on the subject of Prayer.

Who does not know of the martial prowess and magnanimity of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Before him the Punjab was divided into small principalities engaged in internecine warfare. In conquering and consolidating the Punjab into a cohesive whole, the Maharaja had to undertake many difficult and perilous expeditions under the most trying circumstances. But the Maharaja never lost his nerve. On all difficult occasions, he would pray before the Almighty for the successful completion of his compaigns. Once, a Sikh chieftain, who had earlier been a dreaded dacoit, raised the standard of revolt against Ranjit Singh. After subjugating him with some difficulty, the

Maharaja sent him as a prisoner to be confined in the Rohtas Fort. During his imprisonment, the chieftain became all the more ill-tempered, abusive and impatient. For hours he would rave against man and God. Faith in God is the mainstay of true happiness. Devoid of this blessing, the wretch, suffered intolerable agonies all the time. The frightening prison walls made him all the more miserable. Whenever the attendants brought him food, the prisoner would start abusing the Maharaja, using most foul and vituperative language. One day the prisoner found in a recess in the prison wall, a small booklet covered with dust and cobwebs. As he had nothing else to do, he got absorbed in reading it. The following lines of a hymn arrested his attention :

ਸਦ ਬਖਸਿੰਦੁ ਸਦਾ ਮਿਹਰਵਾਨਾ ਸਭਨਾ ਦੇਇ ਅਧਾਰੀ ।
(ਟੋੜੀ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 713)

(O Lord, Thou art ever gracious and forgiving
Thou provideth sustenance to all.)

This set him thinking. He had always looked upon God as a frightful and cruel entity. Was God really kind and forgiving, full of eternal compassion, giving protection to all including a sinner like him ? When a sinner is sorely disappointed with life, his mind readily starts absorbing the truth. The true purport of these lines gave great comfort to this habitual sinner.

One night there was a great storm with thunder and rain. The prisoner could not get any sleep. He kept on thinking, he was a great sinner but the ever forgiving God, as the hymn says, will forgive him. Feeling greatly repentant he started praying with folded hands :

"O Lord, I am a killer and a murderer. In my wild youth, I was the cause of hundreds of women being widowed and thousands of children orphaned. I have been the scourge of innocent human beings. I am also guilty of treason against the kind hearted Maharaja who transformed a dacoit into a chieftain, O Holy Father, my crimes deserve the severest punishment in hell. But Thou are ever gracious pray forgive, and redeem this despicable wretch also".

When morning came he again resumed his study of the hymns. He came to the following lines :

ਜਾਕਉ ਮੁਸਕਲੁ ਅਤਿ ਬਣੈ ਢੋਈ ਕੋਇ ਨ ਦੇਇ ॥
ਲਾਗੂ ਹੋਏ ਦੁਸਮਨਾ ਸਾਕ ਭਿ ਭਜਿ ਖਲੇ ॥
ਸਭੋ ਭਜੈ ਆਸਰਾ ਚੁਕੈ ਸਭ ਅਸਰਾਉ ॥
ਚਿਤਿ ਆਵੈ ਓਸੁ ਪਾਰਬ੍ਰਹਮੁ ਲਗੈ ਨ ਤਤੀ ਵਾਉ ॥
(ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗੁ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 70)

(When you are in extreme distress and no one is prepared to come to your rescue, when your friends turn into enemies and your kith and kin forsake you, when all supports collapse and there is nowhere to seek refuge, the remembrance of the Lord, will protect and save you from every harm.)

The prisoner sang this hymn over and over again. It brought him great peace. For years his soul had known nothing but deep anguish. Now he tasted bliss. Faith in God and His mercy lifted his soul from the infernal pit into celestial regions. All his doubts had disappeared. His heart which had been restless like the waves of the ocean was now tranquil like a pool. True repentance for his misdeeds had brought solace to his conscience. Now he devoted more and more time everyday to the study of the scriptural hymns. This led to the transmutation of his entire personality. He became civil and courteous. The prison guards were amazed at this change in his manner, from foul mouthed vituperation to sweetness and humility.

A few days later the Maharaja happened to visit Rohtas. Due to sudden indisposition he could not get any sleep that night. He tried many medicines but sleep eluded him. At last he took recourse to prayer :

"O Lord, be merciful. Grant me sleep and rest."

Soon, he fell into sound sleep and awoke wonderfully refreshed and cheerful. His Prime Minister, Raja Dhyan Singh was with him. The Maharaja narrated his experience to him :

"Rajaji, last night the Lord answered my prayer and I slept as I have seldom slept before. Miraculously, my indisposition has also been cured. As a token of my gratitude to the

Almighty I want to set free some notorious life convict,"

"Your Majesty!" said Raja Dhyan Singh, "There is a convict in the Rohtas Fort itself. In my humble opinion he is the most deserving of your compassion."

Release orders were issued immediately. The good news were carried to the prisoner and he was brought before the Maharaja. "I remember you," said the Maharaja. "Has the prison done you any good or are you as tough and wicked as before?"

Relating his whole experience, the prisoner replied, "Kind Sire, my gratitude to you knows no bounds. It was your kindness which elevated a dacoit like me to the position of a Sardar. Again it was because of my imprisonment in your fort that I have been blessed by the love of God. It was here that I attained true happiness. And now by the grace of God and your kindness I have been set free. A day will come when the true Lord will cut the shackles of my flesh and set my captive soul free. As the Gurbani says:

> ਭਉਜਲੁ ਬਿਖਮੁ ਅਸਗਾਹੁ ਗੁਰ ਸਬਦੀ ਪਾਰਿ ਪਾਹਿ ॥
> (ਰਾਮ : ਵਾਰ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 962)

(It is only by hearing the Guru's word that we can cross this stormy and fathomless ocean of life.)

The Maharaja was greatly pleased with this transformation in the prisoner. He expressed a desire to restore him to his earlier position but the prisoner politely declined the honour, saying:

> ਮਤੁ ਦੇਖਿ ਭੂਲਾ ਵੀਸਰੈ ਤੇਰਾ ਚਿਤਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਨਾਉ ॥
> (ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗੁ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 14)

> (O Heavenly Father, spare me such worldly position and honour which might make me forget Thy holy name.)

Faith in God and the efficacy of prayer, bring peace to our mind. Once we seek refuge in Him, pain and pestilence cease to distress us. Those who are sunk in the morass of materialism, deny the existence of God and the utility of prayer. We should not listen to them. We should always remember that God is our gracious Father and we are His errant children.

ਜੈਸਾ ਬਾਲਕੁ ਭਾਇ ਸੁਭਾਈ ਲਖ ਅਪਰਾਧ ਕਮਾਵੈ ॥
ਕਰਿ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ ਝਿੜਕੇ ਬਹੁ ਭਾਤੀ ਬਹੁੜਿ ਪਿਤਾ ਗਲਿ ਲਾਵੈ ॥
(ਸੋਰਠਿ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 624)

(The delinquent child commits a million mistakes. The loving father sermonises and rebukes him but ultimately forgives him. Likewise, our heavenly Father embraces us, forgiving our countless sins.)

God loves us and it is only by loving Him that we can gain access to Him. Said the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh :

ਸਾਚ ਕਹੋਂ ਸੁਨਿ ਲੇਹੁ ਸਭੈ ਜਿਨ ਪ੍ਰੇਮ ਕੀਓ ਤਿਨ ਹੀ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਪਾਇਓ ॥

(Hearken unto me, for verily do I say that only those who love God attain union with Him.)

Human life is transient. Ultimately everyone has to appear in the court of God where we shall be judged by our deeds. Either immutable bliss will be ours or we shall be doomed to the miserable cycle of birth and death. Let us, therefore, make the best of this life by remaining pure in word and deed and by always seeking forgiveness by praying to the Lord, as in the following hymn of Guru Arjan :

ਬਿਲਾਵਲੁ ਮਹਲਾ ੫ ॥
ਰਾਖਹੁ ਅਪਨੀ ਸਰਨਿ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਮੋਹਿ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰੇ ॥
ਸੇਵਾ ਕਛੂ ਨ ਜਾਨਊ ਨੀਚੁ ਮੂਰਖਾਰੇ ॥ ੧ ॥
ਮਾਨੁ ਕਰਉ ਤੁਧੁ ਊਪਰੇ ਮੇਰੇ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਪਿਆਰੇ ॥
ਹਮ ਅਪਰਾਧੀ ਸਦ ਭੂਲਤੇ ਤੁਮ ਬਖਸਨਹਾਰੇ ॥ ੧ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
ਹਮ ਅਵਗਨ ਕਰਹ ਅਸੰਖ ਨੀਤਿ ਤੁਮ ਨਿਰਗੁਨ ਦਾਤਾਰੇ ॥
ਦਾਸੀ ਸੰਗਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਤਿਆਗਿ ਏ ਕਰਮ ਹਮਾਰੇ ॥ ੨ ॥
ਤੁਮ ਦੇਵਹੁ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਦਇਆ ਧਾਰਿ ਹਮ ਅਕਿਰਤਘਨਾਰੇ ॥
ਲਾਗਿ ਪਰੇ ਤੇਰੇ ਦਾਨ ਸਿਉ ਨਹ ਚਿਤਿ ਖਸਮਾਰੇ ॥ ੩ ॥
ਤੁਝ ਤੇ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਕਿਛੁ ਨਹੀ ਭਵ ਕਾਟਨਹਾਰੇ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਰਣਿ ਦਇਆਲ ਗੁਰ ਲੇਹੁ ਮੁਗਧ ਉਧਾਰੇ ॥ ੪ ॥ ੪ ॥ ੩੪ ॥
(ਬਿਲਾਵਲ ਮ: 5, 809 ਪੰਨਾ)

(Oh God, extend me Thy protection with Thy graciousness. I am a lowly foolish creature, knowing not how to serve Thee. Oh revered beloved, You are my pride. We sinners are ever forgetful, but You are ever forgiving. We keep on committing countless sins, but Thou art gracious even to those without merit. You keep on bestowing Your countless gifts, but we remain ever ungrateful. Being attached to Your bounty, we forsake Thee. There is nothing beyond You, Oh destroyer of shackles. Says Nanak, I seek Thy refuge, oh compassionate Master, do grant redemption to morons like me.)

ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਪਿਤਾ ਤੂੰ ਹੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਮਾਤਾ ॥ ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਬੰਧਪੁ ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਭ੍ਰਾਤਾ ॥
ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰਾ ਰਾਖਾ ਸਭਨੀ ਥਾਈ ਤਾ ਭਉ ਕੇਹਾ ਕਾੜਾ ਜੀਉ ॥ ੧ ॥
ਤੁਮਰੀ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾ ਤੇ ਤੁਧੁ ਪਛਾਣਾ ॥ ਤੂੰ ਮੇਰੀ ਓਟ ਤੂੰ ਹੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਮਾਣਾ ॥
ਤੁਝ ਬਿਨੁ ਦੂਜਾ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਕੋਈ ਸਭੁ ਤੇਰਾ ਖੇਲੁ ਅਖਾੜਾ ਜੀਉ ॥ ੨ ॥
ਜੀਅ ਜੰਤੁ ਸਭਿ ਤੁਧੁ ਉਪਾਏ ॥ ਜਿਤੁ ਜਿਤੁ ਭਾਣਾ ਤਿਤੁ ਤਿਤੁ ਲਾਏ ॥
ਸਭ ਕਿਛੁ ਕੀਤਾ ਤੇਰਾ ਹੋਵੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਿਛੁ ਅਸਾੜਾ ਜੀਉ ॥ ੩ ॥
ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇ ਮਹਾ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਆ ॥
ਹਰਿ ਗੁਣ ਗਾਇ ਮੇਰਾ ਮਨੁ ਸੀਤਲਾਇਆ ॥
ਗੁਰਿ ਪਰੈ ਵਜੀ ਵਾਧਾਈ ਨਾਨਕ ਜਿਤਾ ਬਿਖਾੜਾ ਜੀਉ ॥ ੪॥੨੪ ॥ ੩੧॥
(ਮਾਝ ਮ: 5, 103 ਪੰਨਾ)

(O Lord, Thou art my father and mother, relative and brother. With You as my protector everywhere, I have no fear or anxiety. Only through Thy grace can I realise Thee. You are my protection and my pride. There is none besides Thee for Thou art the sole creator of the cosmos. All living beings are Thy creation. You assign them the tasks that Thou wills. All events occur as Thou desireth. We have no say in them. Meditating on Thy name has given me infinite peace. My mind is at rest singing Thy praises Sayeth Nanak with the grace of the perfect Master, I have conquered the battle of life)."

GURMUKH

[ਗੁਰਮੁੱਖ]

In the Muzzafarpur district of Bihar there is a village called Vassar. This village is situated on the bank of the Gandak, a tributary of the Ganges. Virtually this village comprises the ruins of a vast metropolis called Vaishali, dating back to 1000 B.C. Vaishali was a greatly admired, picturesque and beautiful city. Ancient historical records[1] refer to it as heaven on earth.

Vaishali was divided into three major sectors. The first sector contained seven thousand houses with golden cupolas. The second sector had fourteen thousand houses with silver cupolas, while in the third sector there were twenty one thousand houses with copper cupolas.[2]

The rich metal content and the workmanship of those cupolas was an indicator of the degree of affluence and grandeur that Vaishali had attained. Despite this not all its inhabitants seemed to be content and happy. In one isolated corner of the city an unhappy mendicant sat cross-legged under a Sal tree, on the bank of the Gandak. The shade of the tree was interspersed with the rays of the sun reflected from a golden dome. Who was this recluse ? He was a prince who had renounced all the pleasures and luxuries of the palace. In the pursuit of enlightenment and self realisation he had discarded his royal robes and put on the garb of a *Bhikshu*. His name was Mahavira. In the Jain religious granth, *Acharang Sutra*, Mahavira's renunciation is described in these words :

"In thirteen months Varadamana's (Mahavira's) *bhikshu* garb was worn out to shreds and gradually the tatters slid down his body. After this he did not put on any clothes and remained naked like a small child."

In *Kalpa Sutra* it is recorded —

"For twelve long years he remained completely indifferent to the needs of his body and subjected it to many rigorous austerities. Ultimately his shackles were shattered. He was completely disinterested in the worldly affairs. He was like the sky, he did not need any artificial support. He was free like the breeze. His mind became pure and unsullied like the water of a winter torrent. He was now unrestrained like a bird and unattached like the lotus flower."

Buddha's austerities were no less rigorous than Mahavira's. From several Buddhist texts we learn that these austerities were a prolongation of those undertaken by Buddha in his earlier incarnations. Five hundred and fifty five such incarnations as Bodhistavas have been mentioned. Some of these were in human form, others as birds or beasts but every time they were an example of rigorous austerities and denial of body needs.

Austerities on the *Hem Kunt* mountain are also recorded by Guru Gobind Singh in the story of his previous birth. How long was the duration of his meditation in that snowy terrain. ? Bhai Santokh Singh in his great epic *Suraj Prakash* records that the duration was uncountable[3]. It is also mentioned that due to the rigour of these austerities his flesh had so thinned as to reveal the network of veins and arteries.[4]

In the present age of rationalism doubts can be expressed about the truth of these accounts. The object of this essay is neither to raise such doubts, nor to make an attempt to clear them. The object is merely to study why these great seers and prophets who are worshipped by the world and whose lives are recorded in literature with great rhetoric, undertook these austerities ? And to what extent they succeeded in attaining their objectives and how history confirms their achievements.

At the time Mahavira lived and preached India was divided into numerous small principalities, such as Kashi, Kaushal, Ang, Maghada, Vastsa, Kuru Panchala, Sunsena, Avanti, Gandhara, Kamboja etc. These were not subject to any central authority and were constantly engaged in internecine warfare. Violence dominated the entire scene. It presided over the domains of statecraft, economy and religion. In certain respects religion was totally divorced from mercy. Animal sacrifices were symbolic of the extreme cruelty in human nature. Poor dumb creatures were brutally done to death in the ceremonial *Yagnas*. All this bloodshed was intended to propitiate the presiding deity, to earn merit in this world and eternal pleasures in heaven.

Although Mahavira's body had been reduced to a skeleton, his words had acquired through rigorous penances a fiery power. His protests made the people give up the *Yagnas* and the *havanas* and their cruel practices. His teachings took them to the other extreme and bonded them in the vow of complete and total non-violence. The five major precepts of his faith were :

(i) Walk only along the roads and lanes for this involves the minimum possibility of crushing insects and worms under your feet.

(ii) Do not speak harshly for thereby you do violence through words.

(iii) Mendicants and Sadhus must ensure that the food given to them in charity does not involve violence to an animal.

(iv) Make sure that the articles of your daily use are free from germs and other living organisms.

(v) While answering calls of nature take care that no living thing is harmed in the process.

Today these injunctions may seem extremely unpractical and even ludicrous. But there is no denying the fact that the seedling of mercy was transplanted in the Hindu garden from Mahavira's nursery. Prior to Mahavira the symbol of religious ritual was the bloodstream that flowed from the sacrificial altar.

Like Mahavira, Buddha also rested his philosophy on the cornerstone of non-violence. Buddha also realised that the protagonists of these brutal sacrifices were the brahmin priests and until they were brought into the new faith, non-violence could not stand on a firm footing. Then there was the caste system and the concept of untouchability. Buddha tried to demolish these barriers by chosing his disciples from all the castes. Among his foremost and most trusted disciples Sarasuta and Mogaline were brahmins, Ananda was a kshatriya, Upali was a barber and Sunit was a low caste scavenger.

Said Buddha...

"Only he is a true brahmin who is free from anger, performs good deeds, is a seeker of truth, has conquered his desires and is humble in spirit. For such a brahmin the cycle of incarnations is over."

"Only he is a true brahmin in whose mind passion, greed, the desire to assert his rights or to claim rewards has perished."

"Only he is a true brahmin who is pure and unblemished like the moon, who is stable and who has even destroyed the slavishness to the desire for happiness."

"Only he is a true brahmin who through true knowledge has liberated his mind from doubt and has thereby established his claim to salvation."

"Only he is a true brahmin who has taken the vow of non-violence, who observes this vow equally in his dealings with the strong and the weak, and who neither kills nor is instrumental in any killing."

When Mahavira and Buddha preached, the rulers of the land were all followers of the Hindu faith. The teachings of Jainism and Buddhism were not in consonance with the established faith. Under the monarchical system those who preached against the ruler's faith could have been persecuted. But the monarchies of those days were in essence republics and the elected representatives of the people had as much say in the affairs of the state as the ruler. Some of the well known republics of those days were Kapilvastu, Ramgrama, Mithila, Kushinara, Pawa, Piplivan, Alkap, Sunsumar, Keshput etc. The rulers were afraid of public opinion and could ill afford to be autocratic. Moreover the teachings of Mahavira and Buddha were not against the vested interests of the rulers. Said Buddha—

"Want and hunger is the greatest curse. This curse can be removed and the great blessing of Nirvana attained only through true knowledge."

(Dhampada)

Buddha's remedy for hunger was knowledge. Had it been bread, his sermons would have caused anxiety to the rulers. Vested interests become apprehensive only when the preachings of a preceptor take the following form :

ਨਾ ਕੁਛ ਭਾਉ ਭਗਤ ਮੇਂ ਦੇਖਾ ਨ ਕੁਛ ਦੇਖਾ ਪੋਥੀ ਮੇਂ ॥
ਨਾ ਕੁਛ ਗਯਾਨ ਧਯਾਨ ਮੇਂ ਦੇਖਾ ਜੋ ਦੇਖਾ ਸੋ ਰੋਟੀ ਮੇਂ ॥

(I got nothing out of any veneration for the divine and the scriptures availed me not. Spiritual knowledge and meditation left me hungry and cold. I have found true bliss only in bread).

Buddha enjoined peace and contentment. Leave aside bread even to seek cold drinking water by the Bikshus was frowned upon.

Many rulers such as Bimbisara of Magadha and the Raja of Kaushal became his disciples. The spread of Jainism was also attributable to political support. Jainism had taught that hunger and want were the results of the sins committed in the previous births and that such retribution is inexorable. Not only should the people be content with their lot but should also renounce whatever worldly possessions they have. Such exhortations to the subjects which eliminated the possibilities of a rebellion or revolution suited the rulers fine. Said Mahavira :

"Forsake all objects to which you are attached and henceforth do not make any fresh attachments. Do not reciprocate the feelings of those who love you. Only thus would you attain salvation from sin".

Again he said :

"While speaking a monk should use as few words as possible. Whatever he speaks should not be designed to delude his listeners. On the other hand he should answer their questions after great thought and deliberation."

"Even if anyone does violence to him a monk should not be provoked to anger. Should any one abuse him, a monk should not take offence. It is a monk's dharma to accept all iniquities peacefully. *(Kirdang Sutra)*

These teachings of Mahavira pleased the rulers. With the spread of Jainism, they heaved a sigh of relief. They need not bother about those who starved or were penniless. They were merely repaying for their past Karmas. The teachings of Mahavira povided the rulers with an effective remedy to curb the republican tendencies. Lately one of the contemporary rulers had been forced to abdicate under the force of the popular will protesting against his policies. Many rulers embraced Jainism along with their subjects.

Although royal patronage was the major factor responsible for the spread of Buddhism and Jainism, the new teachings had a great impact on the Indian way of life. There was a marked decline in the incidence of crimes like burglary, dacoity and rape. The slaves got their liberty and the lot of the low castes improved considerably. We know this on the testimony of Magasthenese, the Greek ambassador to the kingdom of Magadha.

Thus wrote Magasthenese :

"There is no slavery in India. All the citizens are completely free.........The Indians do not treat even their captured enemies as slaves.

(Fragments of India, Magasthenese Frag-26)

Magasthenese came to India in 328 B. C. while Buddha attained nirvana in 567 B. C. Thus Magasthenese's testimony relates to the conditions prevailing in India over two hundred years after Buddha. Buddhism and Jainism were the major influences in the abolition of slavery in India. That slavery existed in India in some form or the other is borne out by many historical texts. In Chanakya's Arthashastra a whole chapter (2, 13) is devoted to the manner in which the masters should treat their slaves. Arthashastra also records many other social and political evils prevailing in ancient India.

The teachings of Buddha also loosened the bonds of caste system. During Buddha's life time, caste considerations were very stringent and there were no intercaste marriages. The marriage of king Parsenjita throws interesting light on these conditions. Parsenjita wanted to marry into Sakya clan. The Sakya's though politically subservient regarded themselves as a superior race. To get out of a difficult situation they arranged Parsenjita's marriage to a Sakya girl whose mother was a slave. Later, when Parsenjita learnt about this deception the whole affair ended in a grim tragedy. On the other hand when Chandragupta Maurya married the daughter of Selukas, there were no eyebrows raised. His marriage to a Greek girl was regarded as a perfectly normal union. By this time, Buddhist teachings had held the field for some time and the country had become less caste ridden.

The Buddhist and Jain influences remained predominant for a few centuries and almost transformed the social fabric of India. The texture of statecraft, religious and economic policies underwent a change and new norms were introduced. Those who did not come into the Buddhist or the Jain fold adopted Vaishnavism and non-violence. However, this new structure of society did not prove to be very lasting and ultimately collapsed.

Great principles degenerated into narrow dogmas. The pettifogging human mind held on to the husk but lost the essence. Mahavira had taught observance of non-violence towards all living things. Too slavish an interpretation of this concept had a shattering effect on the country's economy. Under the Jain influence the Vaish agriculturists gave up the age old custom of ploughing their fields for fear of killing the earthworms.

As a matter of fact Mahavira's strict injunctions were meant to be applied rigidly to the order of monks. For the householders he had made certain concessions. The non-violence which they were enjoined to observe was of a somewhat lesser degree. This provided for certain inescapable violent practices.

But human mind is such that it revels in going to the extreme. The Vaishnavite Hindus, after they embraced Jainism, stopped tilling their lands and adopted the less sinful profession of banias (tradesmen). The Jats, Gujjars and other tribes who had not yet come under the sway of Jainism were employed by the Vaish owners to plough their fields. In course of time these Vaishnavite landlords became moneylenders and started a wholesale exploitation of the tillers of the soil. The Kshatrya's who adopted the Jain faith gave up arms and joined the ranks of Vaishnavite tradesmen. Even in the present day India the majority of the traders are Jains.

In the sixteenth century when Guru Nanak preached his gospel of love and God's name, the social order was presided over by the Kazis in the case of Muslims, and the Brahmins in the case of Hindus. Among those who renounced their homes and hearths and became recluses the yogis held prominence. With the passage of time and after the decline of Buddhism and Jainism in India their Bhikshus joined the yogic order of Gorakh Nath. Guru Nanak found fault not only with the *Kazis* and Brahmins but also with the Yogis of his day :

ਕਾਦੀ ਕੂੜੁ ਬੋਲਿ ਮਲੁ ਖਾਇ ॥ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਜੀਆ ਘਾਇ ॥
ਜੋਗੀ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਅੰਧੁ ॥ ਤੀਨੇ ਓਜਾੜੇ ਕਾ ਬੰਧੁ ॥
(ਧਨ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 662)

(Kazi through his false utterances eateth dirt, Brahmin undertakes the sacrifice of animals and then makes a pretence of his holy bath. The ascetic, like the blind is unable to find the true path. All the three are lost in wilderness).

The distinction amongst the Kazis, Brahmins and the Yogis was not of a religious but political origin. Kazi represented the rulers and the Brahmins the subjects while the Yogis were outside the limitations of social life. From the religious point of view, one would observe that despite the multiplicity of religions, there were only two broad categories viz. the householders and those who renounced the world. Those who go after the comforts and pleasures of the world, whether they were Hindus or Moslems, belonged to the first category. For them religion was merely a means of fulfilling their worldly desires. They undertook religious vows for the sake of acquiring a beautiful wife, a child or a job. All those who sought the benedictions of the divine powers for their personal gains, prosperity or happiness, fell within this category. Whether they were saying prayers in a mosque or performing *arti* in a temple, they were in reality treading the same path of worldly participation. For them religion had no other meaning. Those who renounced the world followed the path of renunciation, of giving up all their worldly desires. Under this category came the recluses, the *Dervishes* and the *Fakirs*. They were not lured by the pleasures of the world. They discarded the comforts and security of a householder's life. Jains, Buddhists, Jogis, Sanyasis were all advocates of the path of renunciation.

Then the question arises, which of these two paths did Guru Nanak preach ? Was he in favour of the domestic way of life or did he advocate the path of renunciation ? In so far as the question of Hinduism or Islam is concerned, Guru Nanak declared a number of times that he was neither a Hindu nor a Moslem.

During his visit to Mecca the pilgrims asked him, "O holy *Fakir*, are you a Hindu or a Moslem ?" Guru Nanak replied : "I am a witness to both these faiths." *(Gyan Ratnavali)*.

On another occasion a Pathan asked him, "O holy hermit, people talk highly of you. Are you a Hindu or a Moslem ?"

Said Nanak :

ਪਾਂਚ ਭੂਤ ਦੋਹਾਂ ਕੀ ਦੇਹ । ਦਿਵਸ ਚਾਰ ਮੇ ਹੋਤੀ ਖੇਹ ॥

(ਜਨਮ ਸਾਖੀ ਭਾਈ ਬਾਲਾ)

(Both Hindus and Moslems are all made of the same five elements and perish after a brief span of life.)

(Janam Sakhi Bhai Bala)

The domestic life of the Hindu was sunk in the morass of superstition and empty ritual. Guru Nanak was not in favour of such empty worldly participation.

Said he :

ਕੋ ਗਿਰਹੀ ਕਰਮਾ ਕੀ ਸੰਧਿ । ਬਿਨੁ ਬੂਝੇ ਸਭ ਖੜੀਅਸਿ ਬੰਧਿ ॥
(ਬਸੰਤ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1169)

(All those householders who remained engrossed in ritual and did not imbibe the true spiritual knowledge would be dragged to hell in fetters.)

Neither did Guru Nanak favour the recluses and ascetics who put on the ochre robes to acquire the right to beg for food. He condemned them as parasites :

ਘੋਲੀ ਗੇਰੂ ਰੰਗੁ ਚੜਾਇਆ ਵਸਤ੍ਰ ਭੇਖ ਭੇਖਾਰੀ ॥
ਕਾਪੜ ਫਾਰਿ ਬਨਾਈ ਖਿੰਥਾ ਝੋਲੀ ਮਾਇਆ ਧਾਰੀ ॥
ਘਰਿ ਘਰਿ ਮਾਗੈ ਜਗੁ ਪਰਬੋਧੈ ਮਨਿ ਅੰਧੈ ਪਤਿ ਹਾਰੀ ॥
(ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1012)

(*Sanyasis* dye their robes in ochre. They wear this garb and become beggars. They tear a cloth and make it into a shroud and a bag for collecting money. Begging from door to door they instruct the world with a mind, blind and dishonourable.)

In the following verse Guru Nanak painted a vivid picture of those who tormented their bodies in the false hope of gaining spiritual merit :

ਇਕਿ ਵਣਖੰਡਿ ਬੈਸਹਿ ਜਾਇ ਸਦੁ ਨ ਦੇਵਹੀ ॥
ਇਕਿ ਪਾਲਾ ਕਕਰੁ ਭੰਨਿ ਸੀਤਲੁ ਜਲੁ ਹੇਂਵਹੀ ॥
ਇਕਿ ਭਸਮ ਚੜਾਵਹਿ ਅੰਗਿ ਮੈਲੁ ਨ ਧੋਵਹੀ ॥
ਇਕਿ ਜਟਾ ਬਿਕਟ ਬਿਕਰਾਲ ਕੁਲੁ ਘਰੁ ਖੋਵਹੀ ॥
ਇਕਿ ਨਗਨ ਫਿਰਹਿ ਦਿਨੁ ਰਾਤਿ ਨੀਂਦ ਨ ਸੋਵਹੀ ॥
ਇਕਿ ਅਗਨਿ ਜਲਾਵਹਿ ਅੰਗੁ ਆਪੁ ਵਿਗੋਵਹੀ ॥
(ਮ: 1 ਵਾਰ ਮਲਾਰ, ਪੰਨਾ 1284-85)

(There are some who go into wilderness and observe
vows of silence.
There are others who suffer intense cold, frost and exposure.
Others besmear themselves with ashes and remain unwashed
Still others who run their hair into mats dishonouring
their kith and clan.

Others who go naked and sleep neither day nor night
Some wither away by burning themselves from limb to limb.)

Guru Nanak exposed the weaknesses of both worldly participation and renunciation, the two prevailing modes of life. The householders enmeshed in material pursuits were totally bereft of spirituality. The recluses, on the other hand, were sheer escapists, unmindful of their obligations.

According to Guru Nanak both had wavered from their true path.

ਮਮਤਾ ਮੋਹੁ ਕਾਮਣਿ ਹਿਤਕਾਰੀ ॥ ਨ ਅਉਧੂਤੀ ਨਾ ਸੰਸਾਰੀ ॥
(ਰਾਮਕਲੀ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 903)

(Those who are engrossed in physical attachments or sensual pleasures, are neither true ascetics, nor proper householders).

Guru Nanak was aiming at creating an ideal being who could transcend both these ways of life. Such a being, he called a "Gurmukh".

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਸਰ ਅਪਸਰ ਬਿਧਿ ਜਾਣੈ ॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪਰਵਿਰਤਿ ਨਰਵਿਰਤਿ ਪਛਾਣੈ ॥
(ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸ਼ਟ, ਪੰਨਾ 941)

(Gurmukh can distinguish between the good and the evil. Gurmukh knows what to accept or reject).

The entire Sikh history presents a vast panorama in which the ideal of Gurmukh was demonstrated. A substantial portion of Sikh literature is devoted to defining a Gurmukh and enunciating his traits. The Sikh texts also describe the 'Manmukh' as one who is the antithesis of a Gurmukh. The portrait of a 'Manmukh' provides a foil to that of a Gurmukh. One radiant characteristic of a Gurmukh which has been put forth emphatically is his heroism and fearlessness. Guru Amar Das has identified Manmukh with cowardice :

ਮਨਮੁਖੁ ਕਾਇਰੁ ਕਰੂਪੁ ਹੈ ।
(ਮ: 3 ਵਾਰ ਵਡ, ਪੰਨਾ 591)

(A Manmukh is a coward of ugly appearance).

Bhai Gurdas has mentioned heroism as an essential quality of a Gurmukh :

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪੰਡਿਤ ਹੋਇ ਜਗ ਪਰਬੋਧੀਐ ॥
ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਆਪਿ ਗਵਾਇ ਅੰਦਰ ਸੋਧੀਐ ॥
ਚਹੁ ਵਰਨਾ ਉਪਦੇਸ਼ ਸਹਿਜ ਸਮੋਧੀਐ ॥
ਧੰਨ ਜਣੇਂਦੀ ਮਾਉ ਜੋਧਾ ਜੋਧੀਐ ॥

(Gurmukh is a pandit awakening the world with his counsel.
Gurmukh gets rid of his ego to cleanse his mind.
He teaches every one how to attain the Lord.
Blessed are the mothers who give birth to such heroic persons.)

Guru Nanak has also sung the praise of such heroes who claim death as their right and do not demur in laying down their lives for a noble cause :

ਮਰਣੂ ਮੁਣਸਾ ਸੂਰਿਆ ਹਕੁ ਹੈ ਜੋ ਹੋਇ ਮਰਨਿ ਪਰਵਾਣੋਂ ॥
(ਵਡ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 580)

[Blessed are those who claim death as a right for a cause (approved by the Lord)]

Guru Arjan clarified this concept further :

ਜੋ ਸੂਰਾ ਤਿਸ ਹੀ ਹੋਇ ਮਰਣਾ ॥ ਜੋ ਭਾਗੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਜੋਨੀ ਫਿਰਣਾ ॥
(ਮਾਰੂ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 1019)

(Only a hero dies a glorious death. He who is afraid to die is doomed to the cycle of birth and death.)

The heroic death of a Gurmukh is a miracle of human spirit. He may be a house-holder or a recluse. His triumph lies in his glorious death as a Gurmukh for a noble cause.

ਧੰਨੁ ਗਿਰਹੀ ਉਦਾਸੀ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕੀਮਤਿ ਪਾਏ ਜੀਉ ॥
(ਮਾਝ ਮ: 5, ਅਸਟਪਦੀ ਪੰਨਾ 131)

(Blessed is the Gurmukh who as a house-holder or renunciant has understood the essence of life.)

There were several occasions on which Guru Nanak elucidated his ideal of a Gurmukh. In his dialogue with the *Sidhas* he described the main qualities of a Gurmukh. To drive home his point he brought out illustrations from the Ramayana. The powerful demon king of Lanka had abducted Sita. With the exception of an equally poor brother, Rama had no army, no money, or resources with which to rescue her. But he collected his army from the animals of the forest and laid a bridge across the ocean. Rama's miracle lay in his heroic heart with an indomitable spirit. Says Guru Nanak :

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਬਾਂਧਿਓ ਸੇਤੁ ਬਿਧਾਤੈ ॥
ਲੰਕਾ ਲੂਟੀ ਦੈਤ ਸੰਤਾਪੈ ॥
ਰਾਮਚੰਦਿ ਮਾਰਿਓ ਅਹਿ ਰਾਵਣੁ ॥ (ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸ਼ਟ, ਪੰਨਾ 942)

(Gurmukh is like Rama, who built a bridge across the ocean, and rid Lanka of its demons. Thus did Ram Chander vanquish Ravan.)

Guru Nanak reminded the *Sidhas* that in contemporary India, not one but thousands of Sitas were being abducted. In the following lines Guru Nanak has described in vivid poetic imagery, the death and desolation brought about by Babar's invasion of India and how countless Hindu women were dishonoured :

ਜਿਨ ਸਿਰਿ ਸੋਹਨਿ ਪਟੀਆ ਮਾਂਗੀ ਪਾਇ ਸੰਧੂਰੁ ॥
ਸੇ ਸਿਰ ਕਾਤੀ ਮੁੰਨੀਅਨ ਗਲ ਵਿਚਿ ਆਵੈ ਧੂੜਿ ॥
……………………………………
……………………………………
ਬਾਬਰਵਾਣੀ ਫਿਰਿ ਗਈ ਕੁਇਰੁ ਨ ਰੋਟੀ ਖਾਇ ॥
……………………………………

(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 417)

(The heads with beautiful tresses and vermillion in the partings are sheared with scissors and the throats are choked with dust.
When the writ of Babur ran in the country nothing was left to eat for the Pathan princes.)

The Guru exhorted the Hindus not to put up with such degradation. Referring to the plunder and pillage by the Moghul invader, he wrote :

ਪਾਪ ਕੀ ਜੰਞ ਲੈ ਕਾਬਲਹੁ ਧਾਇਆ ਜੋਰੀ ਮੰਗ ਦਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੋ ॥
ਸਰਮੁ ਧਰਮੁ ਦੂਇ ਛਪਿ ਖਲੋਏ ਕੂੜੁ ਫਿਰੈ ਪਰਧਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੋ ॥
(ਤਿਲੰਗ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 722)

(Babar, the Mughul had come with his hordes of sin
from Kabul, and plundered the country.
Righteousness and sense of shame hid themselves
out of fear. Falsehood reigned supreme.)

The amount of booty that the invaders got at the point of sword staggers the imagination.[5] How did this happen? This was because religion had adopted the cult of Ahimsa. But where was the sense of shame? Was it also lost? Could those who had acknowledged Ahimsa, suffer this indignity silently? Or were they merely cursing and bemoaning their fate. But what impact could these curses make?

Guru Nanak has said :

ਥਾਨ ਮਕਾਮੁ ਜਲੇ ਬਿਜ ਮੰਦਰ ਮੁਛਿ ਮੁਛਿ ਕੁਇਰ ਰੁਲਾਇਆ ॥
ਕੋਈ ਮੁਗਲੁ ਨ ਹੋਆ ਅੰਧਾ ਕਿਨੈ ਨ ਪਰਚਾ ਲਾਇਆ ॥
(ਆਸਾ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 417-18)

(Babar burnt the age old temples. Princelings were cut
into pieces. Yet not a Moghul was blinded nor did
the curses or charms have any effect.)

Guru Nanak also taught compassion and non-violence but with the Guru, Ahimsa was not an end by itself. It had an ultimate objective. He was aiming at a higher state of mind in which the human soul becomes one with the Immanent Cosmic presence.

ਜਿਸੁ ਮਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ਨ ਤਾਕਉ ਹਿੰਸਾ ਲੋਭੁ ਵਿਸਾਰੇ ॥
(ਸਾਰੰਗ ਮ: 1, ਪੰਨਾ 1198)

(He whose mind is in tune with the infinite discards
ego, greed and violence).

Non-violence is a natural bye-product of such a state of mind. To attain non-violence one must do violence to one's ego and self. After one has killed one's ego, the heart spontaneously becomes the embodiment of compassion for all living things :

ਜੀਵਤੁ ਮਰੈ ਤਾ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਸੂਝੈ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਸਰਬ ਦਇਆ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਤਾਕਉ ਮਿਲੈ ਵਡਾਈ ਆਪੁ ਪਛਾਣੈ ਸਰਬ ਜੀਆ ॥
(ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸਟਿ, ਪੰਨਾ 940)

> (When one dies to self one comes to realise that All Merciful God prevails everywhere. Says Nanak those only attain greatness who recognise God in every one).

Ethics and morality intermingle with the philosophy of non-violence. Ethics and morality therefore, dominate Buddhist and Jain thought. What position did Guru Nanak's philosophy take ? This raises a very vital question about the basic relationship between spirituality and good actions.

From ancient times religion had manifested itself in two broad aspects-spiritual and moral. Through the passage of time emphasis was shifting from one aspect to the other. The imbalance between these two aspects had often led religion into the quagmire of superstition and blind faith. It had also given rise to endless controversies. There is no denying the fact that the purpose of religion was to make human life virtuous and sinless. Buddha's eight-fold[6] moral code was meant to banish sin from man's soul. Each one of these eight precepts had four subdivisions. Thus meditation was of four kinds[7] and so were, the moral efforts for conquering sin.[8]

Jainism attaches no less importance to ethics but Jain preceptors, unlike the Buddhist, soon realised that the moral codes were not so easy of implementation. Human effort to uproot sin from the mind has serious limitations. Cynicism grew and ultimately Jainism despaired of human capacity to eschew evil and always perform right actions. Jain teachers began exhorting their followers to become actionless. Thus, through actionlessness they could save themselves from evil actions. Action, therefore, came to be regarded in the Jain thought as the major source of evil.

Mahavira said :

"All pleasures arise out of actions. Action, therefore, leads to sinfulness. In fact it is action which is the cause of death."

(Sutra Kirdang)

Both Jainism and Buddhism try to bring about moral awakening through exercising control over the senses.

In the eleventh century there once was a philosopher named Buali Muskawya. He was a Minister in the court of Sultan Adud Daula. He was also a Unani physician and a historian. In one of his books, *Tehzib-ul-Ikhlaq* he reckoned all misdeeds, as diseases and also prescribed his treatment for them. According to him there were eight types of misdeeds, including greed and miserliness. To overcome these diseases, according to Buali, there were two ways. One was to use as medicine the very opposite of the disease c.f. for miserliness become a spendthrift like a prince. The second course was that since all diseases could be attributed to excessive love or anger, we should try to find a way to curb the latter. Buali dealt with his thesis in great detail. We may not agree with him but yet there is no doubt that there is something which is the root cause of all misdeeds or evil.

Guru Nanak regarded human pride and egotism as the main spring of all evil. In the Holy Granth, ego has been denounced as a fatal disease :

ਹਉਮੈ ਦੀਰਘ ਰੋਗੁ ਹੈ ਦਾਰੂ ਭੀ ਇਸੁ ਮਾਹਿ ॥
(ਵਾਰ ਆਸਾ: ਮ: 2, ਪੰਨਾ 466)
ਜਸੁ ਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ਤੂਟੈ ਹਉ ਰੋਗ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੋ ਜਨੁ ਸਦਾ ਅਰੋਗੁ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਸੁਖਮਨੀ 5, ਪੰਨਾ 282)

(He, whose egotism has been cured by the grace of the Guru becomes forever a healthy and disease free person).

ਖੁਦੀ ਮਿਟੀ ਤਬ ਸੁਖ ਭਏ ਮਨ ਤਨ ਭਏ ਅਰੋਗ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸਟੀ ਆਇਆ ਉਸਤਤਿ ਕਰਨੈ ਜੋਗੁ ॥
(ਗਉੜੀ ਬਾਵਨ ਅਖਰੀ ਮ: 5, ਪੰਨਾ 260)

(Only after I conquered my ego did eternal peace pervade my soul. My mind and body became free from disease I got a glimpse of the ever praisworthy Lord.)

Guru Nanak did not divide people into Hindus or Moslems but into Gurmukhs and Man- mukhs. A Gurmukh is one who has attained self realization and can distinguish between good and evil. He knows what to accept and what to reject. Such seekers receive a place of honour in the heavenly kingdom.

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਦਰਗਹ ਪਾਵੈ ਮਾਣੁ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਖੋਟੇ ਖਰੇ ਪਛਾਣੁ ॥

(ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸਟਿ, ਪੰਨਾ 942)

A Gurmukh is one who has conquered the bonds of his ego.

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਹਉਮੈ ਸਬਦਿ ਜਲਾਏ ॥

(ਸਿਧ ਗੋਸਟਿ, ਪੰਨਾ 942)

(A Gurmukh consumes his ego in the fire of the divine word).

ਮਨ ਅੰਤਰਿ ਹਉਮੈ ਰੋਗੁ ਹੈ ਭ੍ਰਮਿ ਭੂਲੇ ਮਨਮੁਖਿ ਦੁਰਜਨਾ ॥

(ਵਾਰ ਗਉੜੀ, ਮ: 4 ਪੰਨਾ 301)

(The diseased mind is engrossed in its ego. Manmukh, the evil doer, is ever lost in superstition).

Buali had asked, what is pure ? Giving the answer himself he said pure is that through which a healthy person secures self realization. He again said, purity is of two forms, one ordinary and the other specific. That which gives pleasure or satisfaction is nothing but the realisation of desire. From the writing of Buali, one can gather that the two basic aspects of religion, spiritual and moral, are mixed up together.

Ghazali has given a lengthy treatise of these ideas in his book, *Ahyaul Aloom*. The only difference is that for self realisation Ghazali lays emphasis on education.

Guru Nanak taught that spiritual evolution could be attained through meditation on God's name :

ਨਾਨਕ ਭਗਤਾ ਸਦਾ ਵਿਗਾਸੁ ॥ ਸੁਣਿਐ ਦੂਖ ਪਾਪ ਕਾ ਨਾਸੁ ॥

(ਜਪੁਜੀ)

(Sayeth Nanak, those who meditate on God's name vanquish their sins and abide in eternal bliss).

(Jap Ji)

A seed that falls into a garbage heap sprouts and becomes a beautiful plant rising above its surrounding squalor. A lotus flower always keeps itself out of the muddy pond. It never makes any attempt to remove the mud around its roots.

In preferring a similar approach Guru Nanak says that the seeker cannot break the worldly shackles either by force or contrivance.

ਜੋਰੁ ਨ ਜੁਗਤੀ ਛੁਟੈ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ॥ (ਜਪੁਜੀ)

On the other hand a liberated soul slips out quietly and effortlessly from its evil environment even as a cobra slips out of its slough to attain a new shining skin. The Gurmukh, an inveterate seeker of truth, makes no alliance with falsehood :

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਕੂੜ੍ਹ ਨਾ ਭਾਵਈ ਸਚਿ ਰਤੇ ਸਚ ਭਾਇ ॥ (ਸਿਰੀ ਰਾਗੁ ਮ: 2)

(A Gurmukh has an aversion for falsehood. He loves only truth and is forever absorbed in its contemplation.)

Ethics and morality are the by-products of the Gurmukh's contemplation of truth. Emerson was merely corroborating this concept when he wrote :

"Character is the habit of action from the permanent vision of Truth."

Guru Nanak initiated man into the ideals that transformed him into a Gurmukh, while Guru Gobind Singh provided him with the field in which the Gurmukh could translate his ideals into actions. Sikh history is a saga of those Gurmukhs who lived and died in accordance with their ideals and laid down their lives rather than make compromise with falsehood and evil.

Addressing a band of horsemen Buddha had remarked : "you cannot enter the portals of Nirvana while riding these poor dumb animals. To attain eternal bliss one has to conquer and bridle one's mind."[9]

Ideal of a Gurmukh, is not opposed to the analogy of riding a horse. A Gurmukh is one who controls his mind as he does his steed in the battle field.

ਖਾਲਸਾ ਸੋਇ ਨਿਰਧਨ ਕੋ ਪਾਲੈ ॥ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਸੋਇ ਦੁਸ਼ਟ ਕੋ ਗਾਲੈ ॥
ਖਾਲਸਾ ਸੋਇ ਜੋ ਚੜ੍ਹੈ ਤੁਰੰਗ ॥ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਸੋਇ ਕਰੈ ਨਿਤ ਜੰਗ ॥
(ਤਨਖਾਹਨਾਮਾ, ਭਾਈ ਨੰਦ ਲਾਲ)

> (Khalsa is the sustainer of the poor and destroyer of the tyrant. Khalsa rides forth in the battle field to give fight to the forces of tyranny and persecution).

The then prevailing political conditions had necessitated this dual mount—of mind and . war-steed, through which Nirvana was to be achieved.

Lord Mahavira had said :

> "......an intelligent person should shun helping others and coming to their rescue."[10]

But a Gurmukh brimming over with compassion is ever ready to help others. A compasionate Gurmukh has the followiug ideal :

ਦੇਖ ਦੁਖੀ ਕੋ ਦਯਾ ਉਪਾਵਹੁ ॥ ਯਥਾ ਸ਼ਕਤਿ ਤਿਸ ਕਸ਼ਟ ਮਿਟਾਵਹੁ ॥
ਕਰਨ ਦਯਾ ਕੋ ਪੁੰਨ ਘਨੇਰਾ ॥ ਦਯਾ ਕਰਤ ਹੁਇ ਬਡਹੁੰ ਬਡੇਰਾ ॥
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ਕਰਹਿ ਦੀਨ ਕੋ ਸੁਖੀ ਬਿਸਾਲਾ ॥ ਪਰਮੇਸ਼ਵਰ ਹੈ ਤਿਨਹਿੰ ਕ੍ਰਿਪਾਲਾ ॥
(ਸੂਰਜ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼)

(Have compassion for one in adversity and ameliorate his suffering as far as possible. Having compassion is an act of charity and the compassionate will attain greatness. He who alleviates the pain of the poor or needy,, will get God's mercy in turn.)

(Suraj Parkash)

Mahavira's advice of restraining oneself from helping others was, perhaps, right keeping in view the then need of the hour. Battles fought in his time were internal turmoils. Remaining neutral and not taking any side could, perhaps, have been a discreet act of promoting peace.

The golden domes of Vaishali were secure in the peaceful times in which Buddha and Mahavira lived. By the time Guru Nanak appeared on the scene, the climate of peace had undergone a change. The golden domes of the country's glory had lost their lustre. Tons of gold, much more in value than the domes of Vaishali, had been plundered and carried across the borders, by the invaders. Indians were being suffocated by the disgrace they had suffered. The sermon delivered at

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Vaishali was inadequate in the prevailing situation. The Gurmukh had to become progressive as the hour needed; he could no longer remain regressive.[11]

The character, philosophy and morality of a Gurmukh is no doubt an interesting subject; but the question is what practical contribution has the Gurmukhs made in these fields ?

After reaching its zenith, Buddhism faded away in India. Although followers of Jainism are still there, they no longer have their old importance or glory. As to what could be the cause of it all, is by itself a very serious topic and is beyond the scope of this article. Yet, as a passing reference, it can be said that one of the main causes was the caste superiority and untouchability practiced in India. Every new religion bent on reform wants to end the prejudices of the caste system, but, in the long run these prejudices continue to prevail, while the religious reforming zeal wanes. But, the reformist movement reappears in due course in some other form. The religious history of our country is a chain of such movements.

There has been a tradition in India since antiquity, that caste system must prevail even though it may be prejudicial to the country's interests. If caste prejudices are eliminated through the sermons and lectures, these still would exist in the legal processes. If these are eliminated from the law these would still exist in practice. Caste system is like an affliction of gout. If the ankle is cured of it, the knee gets it and if the knee gets alright the elbow gets it. It is this malady alone which is responsible for India's downfall.

Once the Hill Rajas came to see Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru advised them to get baptised as Sikhs, to regain their *Raghuwansi Raj*. But the Rajas begged of the Guru to let them retain their Hindu symbols the *Bodi* and *Janeo* (tuft of hair on head and sacred thread). The Bodi and Janeo are symbols of a superior caste, which are denied to the *Sudras*. It is a badge of caste superiority which the Rajas were not prepared to forego—even if they lost every thing else.

Gurmukh has been cast in a different mould. He is above all caste distinctions. People from all the four *Varunas*, four *Ashramas* or four religions viz. Hinduism, Islam. Buddhism or Jainism are eligible to become Gurmukhs.

But this liberalism could not prove fruitful. People of superior castes scoffed at it. The Brahmins raised objections and the Hindu Rajas took up arms against Guru Gobind Singh.

It was very easy for the Brahmins to instigate the Hindu Rajas against Guru Gobind Singh. History bears ample testimony that the Brahmins, in their religious zeal to protect caste system, had been complaining to the Muslim rulers, against the Gurus.

How would one feel if those, for whose sake one is fighting, turn hostile. It would all depend upon the character of the individual. If and when one has to fight the ruling power empty handed, it is only the strength of his character which keeps him stead-fast. The only point to be seen is this, as to how during the vagaries of battles facing starvation and ordeals, the Gurmukh retained his moral stead-fastness. Buali had said that if an ascetic in his seclusion thinks that he is leading a moral life, he is merely deceiving himself. He can be a religious man, but he cannot be a morally good person. Society is a prerequisite for the test of morality. But as far as my opinion goes, the real characteristics of morality are known only by the way one treats the vanquished in the battle field-especially such enemy who, in his own time, had perpetrated atrocities on women and children.

The battles which demonstrated the maximum sacrifices made by the Sikhs, were fought against Ahmad Shah Abdali. During one of these battles, Abdali's historian Qazi Noor Mohammed gave a fervent testimony of the Sikh character, He wrote, "The Sikhs do not indulge in adultry, nor do they befriend a debauchee or a thief. Sikhs do not rob a woman, be she a maid or a lady."[12]

Thousands of Sikhs who died fighting for a great cause against the overwhelming hordes of Ahmad Shah Abdali were truly cast in the mould of Gurmukh.

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4. ਆਮਿਖ ਸ਼ੁਸ਼ਕ ਦਿਖਤ ਧਮਨੀਗਨ ਤੇਜ ਪ੍ਰਤਾਪ ਦਸੋਂਦਿਸ਼ ਛਾਇ ॥ (ਸੰਤੋਖ ਸਿੰਘ)
5. There is indisputable historical testimony that the booty from the Somnath temple included a chain of solid gold weighing 200 maunds. The Brahmin priests of the Nagarkot temple presented to Mahmud of Ghazni seven lakh gold coins, gold and silver utensils weighing seven hundred maunds, two hundred maunds of pure gold, two thousand maunds of silver and jewellery weighing twenty maunds. The booty from the Mathura temple was no less invaluable. These details have been taken from historical texts by Mohammed Habib, Seweil and Col. Dow.
6. (i) True outlook (ii) True feeling. (iii) True Speech (iv) True coduct. (v) True living (vi) True effort. (vii) True thought. (viii) True meditation.
7. 1. Meditation upon the body. 2. Meditation upon one's feelings. 3. Meditation upon one's emotions and thoughts and 4. Meditation upon one's mind and conduct.
8. (i) Effort to prevent sin taking root in the soul.
    (ii) Effort to uproot the sin which may have already sprouted.
    (iii) Efforts to acquire new virtues.
    (iv) Efforts to promote the growth of existing virtues.
9. ਨਹਿ ਏਤੇਹਿ ਯਾਨੇਹਿ ਗੱਛੇਯ ਅਗਤੰਸਿਸੰ
    ਯਥ ਅੱਤਾਨਾ ਸੁਦੰਤੇ ਨ ਦੰਤੇ ਦੱਤੇਨ ਗੱਛਤਿ ॥
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